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j Brown, E. A.

At the Butterfly House

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AUTHOR

At the Butterfly House.

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H. B. MCARDLE



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AT THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

BOOKS
BY
EDNA A. BROWN

Cloth. Illustrated.
Price per volume Net \$1.35.

FOUR GORDONS
UNCLE DAVID'S BOYS
WHEN MAX CAME
ARNOLD'S LITTLE BROTHER
ARCHER AND THE "PROPHET"
THE SPANISH CHEST
AT THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

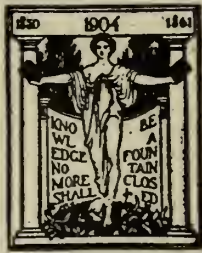


"STOP PRANCING, YOU CRAZY DERVISHES, AND TELL US WHERE YOU FOUND IT." — *Page 356.*

AT THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

BY
EDNA A. BROWN

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GOSS



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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AT THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.
U. S. A.

“Isn’t there going to be another story like the Four Gordons?” the letters asked. “We love all your books, but that one best of any. Please write another, just an every-day story, about boys and girls who live in a little town as we do, and go to church and public school like us, and have to make their own good times at home.”

Well,—here is the story, the “every-day story,” and the author dedicates it with love to all the young people who care about her books.

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us where you found it." (Page 356) . . . *Frontispiece*

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AT THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

AUNT NANCY'S WILL

HAD Cary Dexter not been so busy with all the responsibilities belonging to the exalted position of freshman class president in the Girls' High School, she might have noticed that both her father and mother were unusually preoccupied during the early summer. At intervals it did strike Cary that they sat up late talking and consulting over letters that seemed constantly coming, but these impressions were soon erased when Cary returned to the really important affairs of life. Dad, head of the mathematical department in the big Technical School, was always busy and hurried toward the end of term. That he should be absent-minded was nothing unusual, but more than once, Cary found her mother sitting with idle hands, or

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amusing little Christine at hours when she was ordinarily occupied with paint-brush or drawing-board.

One afternoon, coming in rather earlier than customary, she was surprised to hear her father's voice in the library.

"Why, you're home first, Daddy," she said, appearing in the doorway. "How did you get here so soon?"

"Examinations," replied her father. "The schedule, as you know, is all upset. I have been free since eleven. Come in, Cary, and join our council. Mother and I think our big girl should count in our plans."

Cary dropped her books in a chair by the hall door and came to the couch where her father was sitting.

"What is it, Daddy?" she asked, cuddling close to him. "I thought our vacation was all settled. Has anything happened?"

"We weren't talking of vacation just now. Cary, I have been offered the principalship of the High School in a small town. Shall I accept?"

Cary looked questioningly at her father, alert and rather boyish in appearance, with a tall,

spare figure and clean-shaven face. Only a few gray hairs gleamed on his brown head, and his keen eyes were offset by a pleasant smile. He was quite capable of thundering at a class of boys in a manner that made them shake in their boots, but he could also, as those same lads knew, be a first-class playmate and comrade.

“But I thought you liked the Technical High,” Cary began. “Does it mean that we should have to leave town? But of course it does,—I needn’t have asked. Is it somewhere you *want* to go, Daddy?”

Mr. Dexter looked at his wife with a smile. “Our daughter hits the nail on the head, doesn’t she, Anne? Well, Cary, there are advantages both ways. If we go, we shall live in a very beautiful place in an extremely healthy location. You and Christine will have an outdoor life and all the fun of the country, combined with many privileges that belong to a city. The school is not large, perhaps two hundred pupils, but is in excellent condition and standing, being a combination of an endowed academy and a public school. So far as money is concerned, the change isn’t worth considering, but—”

Again Mr. Dexter stopped and exchanged a

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glance with his wife. Cary, looking up, caught an odd little expression on her mother's face, almost of hurt pride.

"Where is it, Daddy?" she asked at once.

"Ridgefield, Vermont," replied her father.

Cary gave an exclamation. "Not the Ridgefield, where you lived with Great-aunt Nancy when you were a little boy?"

"The very Ridgefield."

Cary looked utterly puzzled. "But I don't understand," she said after a pause. "I've never been there, and I thought—Mother once said you didn't care to go back."

"I think you are old enough now to hear the whole story, Cary," said her father. "You know, of course, that my parents died when I was a little fellow and that Aunt Nancy brought me up. We lived in the old Dexter homestead in Ridgefield, the 'Butterfly House,' as the whole county has nicknamed it."

"Why is it called that?" asked Cary at once.

"For a very good reason," said her father, smiling. "Since I have never mentioned it before, I believe I won't explain now, because if we go to Ridgefield, you will enjoy discovering it for yourself."

“Because the garden is full of butterflies?” queried his daughter.

“There’s a beautiful garden, but I never knew that butterflies favored it above others. You won’t get it out of me. Well, Aunt Nancy was immensely proud of the place and always kept it in perfect condition. It stands on the main street of the village, an old stone house, one of the finest of its type in the State. I lived there from the time I was seven years old, attended Ridgefield Academy, went away to college, but spent all my vacations with Aunt Nancy and considered it my home. Aunt Nancy was peculiar in many ways but I was very fond of her and she was fond of me. After I married, she insisted that we should come that summer just as usual and she appeared devoted to your mother.

“We had no other near relatives, just a distant cousin, living in the west, and as I was Aunt Nancy’s only nephew, and practically her adopted son, it was natural that I should expect the Butterfly House to become my property after her death. Had she left no will, it would have come to me by law, but she left a will, and a strange one it was.”

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Mr. Dexter paused for a moment. His hand was absently caressing Cary's but he was looking at his wife.

"In her will," he went on, "she left me the old mahogany secretary she had used and all its contents. Examination showed absolutely nothing of value in it, merely old letters and some worthless papers."

"But, Daddy," interrupted Cary, "there was a secret drawer, of course. Didn't you find it?"

"Of course there was a secret drawer,—three of them, in fact,—but they held only some old postage-stamps, worth about fifty dollars."

Cary looked dismayed. "I wish I could see that desk," she remarked. "I should like to hunt through it. Where is it?"

"Still in the Butterfly House. There was no room for so big a piece of furniture in our apartment here in the city. I satisfied myself that nothing was concealed and the lawyers also inspected the desk. But that was not the only odd thing about Aunt Nancy's will. She left a queer bequest to your mother,—nothing more nor less than an old rag doll that had been played with by little Dexters for over a century."

Cary looked wonderingly at her mother,

whose lips were curving into a smile which became a laugh as she met the twinkle in Mr. Dexter's eyes.

"We can laugh about it now, Cary," she said, "but fifteen years ago, it didn't seem funny to us. I suppose Aunt Nancy put that in because you were a few months old and she thought you might enjoy the doll as much as many other Dexter babies had done."

"Where is it? I don't remember having it," said her daughter.

"That, too, is still in the Butterfly House. The doll is bigger than you were then, and we were feeling sore and unhappy. We left it in its trunk in the attic. I suppose it is still there. If we go to Ridgefield, perhaps Chrissy will care for it."

"But what did Aunt Nancy do with the house?" asked Cary, turning again to her father.

"After those two bequests in her will, and some provision for a faithful servant, she left all other property to this distant cousin, Anthony Davenport. Anthony is a man of means, and did not care for the Butterfly House. He had never been there and the associations meant

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nothing to him. He felt that the will was peculiar, not to say unjust, and he tried to arrange matters with me, but—well, that was fifteen years ago. There is a difference between the hurt pride of twenty-five and the wider vision of forty,” said Mr. Dexter reflectively. “Anthony has always had the place looked after and more than once has offered me the free use of it, but I never felt like going back even for a summer, nor did your mother. We cared for Aunt Nancy and she for us. We always felt that she meant to place in the secretary some papers that were not there.”

“But it seems as though there *must* be some hidden drawer that you didn’t find,” said Cary hopefully.

“No use, little girl,” said her father, smiling. “More than a few brains and many an hour have been spent over that piece of furniture. Don’t go to Ridgefield, expecting to accomplish what wiser heads than yours couldn’t manage. Your mother and I no longer feel hurt about it; we simply think that Aunt Nancy’s plan, whatever it was, miscarried. The Butterfly House will not be ours until I buy it back from Anthony, as I may some day. But to return to our pres-

ent discussion. The man who has been principal of the Ridgefield High School died suddenly this spring. The committee has offered me the position, with a free hand in managing things and introducing improvements. Anthony heard of the offer and has written me, urging me to go back and to occupy the Butterfly House again."

"Back where everybody knows you," said Cary reflectively. "Daddy, didn't people think Aunt Nancy's will was queer?"

"Indeed they did, little daughter. I was urged to contest it and assured that it might be broken, especially since Anthony announced that he would not oppose any action. It was good, practical advice, but I didn't want to do it, and your mother agreed with me. I shall always believe there was some miscalculation in Aunt Nancy's plans. But that is entirely of the past. Shall we go to Ridgefield and live in the Butterfly House, Cary?"

"Oh, I should love it," Cary began, but stopped short. "Only I should miss the girls and school. Why, Daddy," she added suddenly, "I should have you for a teacher. How funny!"

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“Would it not be?” agreed her father mischievously. “Perhaps you might find it an interesting experience. But there will be plenty of young people at Ridgefield, and if they are like those of my day, you will enjoy them. No, it isn’t a boarding-school in any respect, though some students from other towns may board in the village in order to attend the school. Years ago, it was one of a large number of endowed academies in small New England towns, but as the public school system spread, this was absorbed. It used to be called Ridgefield Academy, but is now just the town High School and is known as that.”

“Do you want to go, Mammy?” Cary asked suddenly.

“I want to do what is best,” said Mrs. Dexter. “We have been talking about it for some time, Cary, though we would not wholly decide until we told you. In many ways, I shall like to go, for I have delightful recollections of the summer I spent there. But I feel that your father is the person to settle the matter. As I remember the house and the town, both are charming. We shall miss our city friends, but there will be many compensations.”

Cary's eyes fell on her little sister, contentedly playing with her dolls and toy dishes.

"The garden used to be wonderful," said her mother, following the direction of her glance, "a garden where fairies ought to live and do live, if there are any left in the world. There would be flower dollies for Christine and a kitten and other things we can't have in a city apartment."

"And the big rag doll in the attic," put in Cary, smiling as her mother kissed Christine's flossy head. "Let's go, all of us. I never lived in a separate house, only in a block."

"The Butterfly House has beautiful big square rooms," her mother began, but broke off suddenly. "Charles, there is the telephone. It's probably for you, so you might as well go in the beginning."

Mr. Dexter left the room, and Cary suddenly found herself included in the embrace her mother was giving Christine.

"Cary, you're a dear," Mrs. Dexter whispered. "Daddy does want to go, and it is best that he should. But he would not let me say anything to you beforehand, and if it was going to be hard for you to leave school and the girls,

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he would have let that count. Of course some things will be difficult, but we shall have much that the city can't give us and we shall not lose our real friends. There will be vacations and visits. Father says, and truly, that he no longer feels the injustice of that will, but I feel it for him, and so it has been harder for me to see this offer without prejudice. But I know that he wishes to accept, and we will make real fun of it and enjoy living in the Butterfly House."

"Oh, I shall hate to leave the girls," sighed Cary. "I was so interested in Aunt Nancy's will that I didn't think of that. And I suppose the High School will be very different."

"Yes," assented her mother, "but perhaps you will like that. A smaller school always has some advantages."

Cary was silent. She was quite sure that she could never like any school so well as the one where she had enjoyed the past year. But all that Daddy said about Ridgefield was interesting, and before September stretched a vacation full of promising pleasures. And *why* was the old Dexter homestead known as the Butterfly House?

CHAPTER II

THE COTTAGE ON THORN

THROUGH the town of Ridgefield wanders a pleasant river, at first scurrying over stones in the shallows, but gradually deepening into a stream strong and wide enough to do real service in turning busy mill wheels. Away back in the hills it has its source, and down the Ridge, behind the town, come numerous smaller streams that during spring freshets bring sufficient snow and muddy water to menace sometimes the Main Street bridge. At the south end of the town lies charming Crystal Lake and all around rise the everlasting hills, green to wooded summits or boasting well-cultivated farm lands. The five mountains that form the Ridge look down from imposing heights, sometimes lowering with storm and cloud, but always giving a sense of protection and brooding calm.

Three-quarters up Thorn, the highest of the

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five, at the end of a little-used cart-path, hides a tiny unpainted cottage, so much a part of the mountain in its grayness and obscurity that only a sharp eye can discover it at any distance. Indeed, the cleared fields about it alone betray its existence, and those fields are not so clear nor the farm so prosperous since Andrew Halliday was carried down the half-obliterated road for the last time. Bushes and shrubs creeping inward upon the clearing show the intention of Thorn to take back to its bosom the little plot of land so hardly wrested from it.

One September morning signs of life appeared early about the gray cottage. First came a few smoke wreaths curling upward and presently the kitchen door opened and a tall girl about sixteen appeared with a milk-pail in her hand. She paused a moment to look at the lake, glimmering under sunrise clouds, cast a glance at drowsy Ridgefield, discernible in the yet shadowed valley, and looked to the mountain summit behind the house.

“Good-morning, old Thorny,” she said softly. “You haven’t your night-cap on. Nice old fellow!”

From a roughly built shack came the im-

patient low of a cow, causing Candace to hasten her steps. Granny would get breakfast, their very simple breakfast, but old Posy must be milked and turned out in the rocky pasture, stretching up the slope of Thorn. Indeed, there was much to be done before Candace could turn her attention to the important task appointed for the day. Posy attended to, the milk must be taken down to John Park's house at the very base of Thorn before the boys set off on their delivery route. And to carry four quarts of milk a mile down a mountain every morning before six o'clock means a good appetite for breakfast. The chickens must wait for theirs until Candace returned.

But Granny Halliday was also astir early, and by the time Candace came back, the fowls were fed and the coffee-pot steaming.

"I don't see how you are going to manage the milk after school begins," Granny said rather anxiously as the girl sat down opposite her. "You can't tramp down to Park's and come home and then go back again 'way to Ridgefield."

"Listen, Granny," said Candace brightly. "Mr. Park says the boys won't start so early

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now the cool weather is coming. The milk needn't be down till half-past six, and then I'll keep right on to town, you see."

"But it won't take nearly three hours to walk three miles, Candace," remonstrated the old lady.

"No, Granny, of course not. I'm expecting to get into Ridgefield about seven, and in bad weather I can ride on the milk team. But Mr. Park is going to speak to Mr. Baker about me. His wife has been looking for somebody to help her about the house, and if she wanted me, I could put in two hours before school. I'll tend to Posy and the hens before I start. Now, Granny!"

Old Mrs. Halliday was wiping a tear from her cheek. "If your father had only lived!" she sighed. "Andrew couldn't bear to see you slavin' this way."

Candace shut her lips tightly. "Father cared so much for an education," she said after a pause. "Somehow I know he'd want me to get mine, even if it meant doing harder things than I plan." As she spoke she looked up at some shelves of worn books. "I'm as strong

as an ox and as tough as a meat-ax, Granny, and it won't hurt me."

"You are strong," her grandmother admitted, "and of course your father wasn't well and everything went against him, no matter how he tried. And then, just as he was getting ahead, Will Pike persuaded him into goin' security. Well, they all do it once. I'm proud that Andrew didn't squeal nor quit when Will ran away and left him to shoulder it all. If that hadn't come, Andrew would have had somethin' to leave you to help get your education."

"Well, as it is, he has left me something, Granny," said the girl quickly. "That's the knowledge of what an education means and the determination to have it. Father never had the chance, but he read and knew about things that were going on in the world. Even though I couldn't attend school last winter, he read with me and taught me, so I'm sure I can enter the second-year class at the High School."

"There's one thing," said old Mrs. Halliday decidedly, "and don't you forget it, Candace. Your ancestors crossed the Connecticut river when this valley was a wilderness, and helped

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settle Ridgefield. You've as blue blood in your veins as any of the town boys and girls. It's just misfortune that has kept you back. Your family is as good as the Richards and the Chapins,—yes, and the Dexters, too."

"That reminds me, Granny," said Candace, helping herself to more oatmeal. "You know Charles Dexter is to take Mr. Wainwright's place as principal of the High School. Last night, Billy Park drove past the Butterfly House and it was lighted, so he thinks some of them have come."

"I knew Charles Dexter when he was a boy, and a nice boy he was," mused old Mrs. Halliday. "How he did love Thorn! He'd come up to see Andrew Saturday afternoons,—they were in the Academy together—and off up the mountain they'd go. No path nor nothin' but they'd make a bee-line for the top. Charlie married such a pretty girl, Anne Cary. She was an artist and was always goin' round with a pencil, makin' the cutest little sketches of people. I don't know what kind of a house-keeper Anne would turn out, but she'd find time to play with her babies whether she darned their stockings or not. She and Charlie were at the

Butterfly House the summer after their wedding. Charles came to old Nancy's funeral and stayed round Ridgefield a week, but neither of them have been here since. He's another man who didn't get what ought to come to him. Nobody ever understood why Nancy didn't leave him the Butterfly House, as he had every reason to expect she would. There was a little girl,—she must be about your age, Candace. I wonder if there are any other children."

"Billy thinks there are two girls, one quite a baby," Candace replied, her mind busy on other matters. So the new principal of the High School had been her father's friend! Perhaps Mr. Dexter would know some way for her to earn the money for college. That had been her father's dream, and when he knew that for him it had forever faded, he brought back the magic colors by dreaming it for Candace, and encouraging her to see visions through his eyes. College catalogues, obtainable for the asking, were tucked among those old books. Candace could have recited offhand the expenses and requirements of each institution for women, though their very names were to her as the stars, shining but inaccessible.

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“Just remember, Candace,” her father had said to her in one of the rare moments when he was free from pain, “if you can get *your* education, I’ll be having one through you. And it will be something nobody can ever cheat you out of or take away. And remember, too, that ‘there’s no such word as fail.’ ”

Candace remembered it, remembered all the books read aloud in that little kitchen. Though her father’s long illness and Granny’s need of help kept her from school the previous winter, now she had her chance, and surely if the new principal had cared for her father, he would be her friend, too. To his unknown daughter she gave not a thought.

Candace was recalled from her reverie by Granny’s voice, sounding afar off and speaking of sleeves and collars. Candace came down to earth with a thud, not, however, unpleasant. Why, of course, there was a new dress to be finished!

Having hastily cleared the table, she ran up to her little attic room to return with the half-completed garment.

“Is it going to be becoming, Granny?” she asked, holding it before her. “I know I ought

to wear brown, because my hair is red, but all the browns were ugly and this green was a remnant, so I thought I ought to take it. And you know I have two fifty-cent middies to wear with my old blue skirt."

"Yes, child, it's becomin'," said Granny, speaking no more than the literal truth, for Candace's chestnut hair and red-brown eyes looked very well against the soft green material.

"I'm as brown as an Indian with picking berries all summer, and my eyes are like muddy water," the girl sighed, putting it down. "Well, Granny, if you'll baste in the sleeves, I'll wash these dishes and then hem the skirt."

"I wish we could afford somethin' more," said Granny, producing her thimble. "I'd like you to have pretty things such as Janet Chapin and Amy Richards will wear."

"This will be pretty," said Candace quickly. "And if Mrs. Baker does want me to help her, I shall spend the first money I earn in buying you a new bonnet, Granny, so you'll have no excuse when the Parks ask you to drive in to church and hear Mr. Richards preach. Is that the morning train?"

A spoon in her hand, Candace stepped to the

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door to look down the valley. Around the farther shore of Crystal Lake crept one of the few trains that come up from the south and connect Ridgefield with the more distant world. Candace watched it skirt the lake shore, turn towards the town, heard it come to a stand at the station.

“There’s something so romantic about a train,” she remarked aloud. “Some day, Granny, I think my fortune is coming on the morning train. I can’t say whether it will appear as a feather duster or as a nice young man, but come it will. I suppose that every single day brings a new experience for somebody.”

On that especial day it was Cary Dexter to whom the new experience was coming, and as she descended from the Pullman, perhaps it was not wholly accident that caused her to lift her eyes to the Ridge. The girl on the slope of Thorn could not see the one on the station platform, nor could Cary, even had she known where to look, have distinguished the cottage on the mountain. Yet one looked up, the other down, and, perhaps for a second, the sense of a coming future touched the consciousness of both.



"SOME DAY, I THINK MY FORTUNE IS COMING ON THE MORNING
TRAIN." — *Page 32.*

CHAPTER III

CARY SEES THE BUTTERFLY

CARY's arrival that September morning was her first visit to the new home. July had been spent as usual at the seashore, where she rowed, fished, bathed, sailed, danced, and picnicked in such a crowd of gay young people and such a steady good time that the month seemed but a week. Busy days of packing followed, for though the Butterfly House was fully furnished, its large rooms afforded ample space for whatever articles they chose to take from the city home.

Cary packed books till she lost count in a dizzy sense of numbers; she sorted her own possessions; she took little Christine for afternoons in the park, while her mother directed experienced workmen in the apartment, and Daddy made flying trips between the city and Ridgefield, already absorbed in plans for the

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new school. Just as the last box was ready and the family was about to leave for Vermont, Grandmother Cary demanded a visit from her namesake granddaughter.

Cary was always ready to spend a week in the quiet New Jersey town, so she went willingly while the rest set their faces northward. Now the visit was over, Uncle Jack had escorted her as far as Boston, and Daddy would meet her on arrival.

The dawn was yet early when Cary arose and dressed that she might have an opportunity to see the beautiful Vermont valley through which the train was traveling. Trails of cloud lingered on the soft green hillsides, hills possessing a charming attraction of their own, quite unlike the sterner slopes of New Hampshire. Many lovely vistas were opened by the hurrying train, glimpses of lake and river and wood, offering enticing places for picnics.

After breakfast their way persistently followed a river and before long the porter came to take Cary's bag and say politely: "Ridgefield next, Miss." Almost before she realized her arrival, Cary had greeted her father rapturously, given that one glance up to the slopes

of Thorn and was settling herself in a little motor-car.

Ridgefield proved a pretty town, with public buildings and shops surrounding an attractive square and following Main Street for two blocks. Then the street crossed the river to become one of residences, cozy and attractive, some of quite imposing character, but all bearing witness to the prosperity of the place. White houses stood discreetly separated from the street by well-kept lawns, which stretched behind to the river, where Cary caught glimpses of an occasional boat or canoe.

In about five minutes they came to a big, rather bare building set among dismal-looking dark firs. Whatever merit its original architecture may have possessed was completely ruined by two box-like wings at either end. A dreadful suspicion entered Cary's mind, but it had hardly taken form before she saw the old inscription over the door: "Ridgefield Academy, 1809."

"Here's the school," Mr. Dexter was saying.

Quite unable to speak, Cary stared at it. Her father had spoken with a tone of interest, even of real pride. "Ridgefield has sent out

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some famous alumni," he added. "I hope we shall continue to do so."

Too dismayed to put her feelings into words, Cary looked in agonized silence. If that was the outside of the High School, what *could* its interior be? She opened her lips to ask a question, but her father was busy returning the greetings of passing people, all of whom nodded and smiled cordially and glanced at Cary with real interest.

"You seem to know everybody," Cary observed, forgetting her dismay over the appearance of the High School.

"Ridgefield knew me as a boy," Mr. Dexter answered. "Why, it is like coming home again. I had no idea that people would be so pleased to see me. Now, in a minute, you will see the Butterfly House," he added as the car sped swiftly up the wide, tree-shaded street.

Cary leaned forward, watching eagerly. Soon they came to a big three-story stone house with brick ends and an ell at the back. From the front door a walk led directly to the street and on either side of the door were bay windows. A white-pillared porch stretched the

whole of the western side, overlooking a yard so extensive as really to merit the name of grounds.

“But, why—?” began Cary. “*Oh!*” she exclaimed. “Was it made on purpose, Daddy?”

“No, it just happened,” replied her father, stopping his car. “Only after they did see it, they touched up the masonry the next time it was pointed so as to make it stand out more distinctly.”

The old house was built of smoothed field-stone, set in heavy mortar. Above and to the left of the center door, below the upper windows, were four stones a shade darker than those composing the rest of the front. Chance had so directed the hand of the builder that through shape and position, they formed the four wings of a big butterfly, distinctly and clearly outlined among the lighter-colored stones of the façade. The surrounding mortar was now touched with black, so that the butterfly looked as though just alighted with wings outspread.

Cary's delight knew no bounds. She forgot

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her disappointment over the High School, and could hardly stop to greet her mother and Christine, coming down the walk.

“Isn’t it exciting and romantic to live in a house like this!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Mammy, I’m crazy to see the inside. It must be something great to come up to the butterfly.”

“Explore as fast as you choose,” laughed her mother. “I’ll be with you in a minute.”

Cary gave Christine another hug, dropped her coat and hat just inside the front door and began to look eagerly about.

On either side of the hall were two rooms, the southeastern one used as a sitting-room. The original square design had been enlarged at one end so that the ceiling, elsewhere cozily low, rose in an arch over the eastern side and took in three big windows. On the south was a bay with five narrow windows, meaning sunshine from morning to night. Across the front hall, where went up a pretty winding stair with a finely curved mahogany railing, was the library, another large square room, with a big fireplace, a southern bay window and two French casement windows looking out on the porch and down through the garden to the river. Next

this was a small northwest room with two windows.

"This was Aunt Nancy's bedroom," explained Mrs. Dexter, rejoining her daughter. "Father is going to take it for his study."

Cary looked about in delight. Shelving was already in place and part of the books were unpacked. Others in cases were yet on the porch.

"Is that the old secretary?" she suddenly demanded.

"Yes," replied her mother, glancing at the massive piece of furniture at one side of the fireplace. "It always stood here."

Cary looked from it to the very modern roll-top desk her father had brought with him. "Do you think Daddy will let me explore it?" she asked in an awestruck whisper.

"Oh, yes, I know he will, but you'd better keep that for a rainy day. Only, Cary, don't set your heart on finding anything especial. It has been too thoroughly examined for that to be likely."

"No, I won't," Cary agreed, "but I should like to hunt for the secret drawers and find them for myself. Where does this other door go?"

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"Into the dining-room," replied her mother.

Cary opened it and again stopped in joy. She faced a big room, square like the others, with a fireplace on the north side, under a fine white-painted colonial mantel like that in the library. At one side of the hearth was a narrow tall cupboard let into the chimney space. Seven doors had this dining-room, and but one window looking north, yet the room was anything but dark, for the south doors to living-room and library furnished floods of light.

"Where do they all go?" Cary demanded, opening one door after another. Three opened into rooms already seen, a fourth into a closet under the front stairs, a fifth into a narrow hall leading to a side door, a sixth into a huge china-closet, containing a window and a set basin, and the seventh into the kitchen.

As Cary opened the seventh door, and looked into a big sunny room, with two east and two west windows, and north windows in both pantry and kitchen entry, she stopped in surprise to see a woman sitting by the table. Mrs. Dexter also looked surprised. Ten minutes earlier, hurrying to meet Cary, she had shut the door

upon a kitchen that, though far from orderly, was quite tenantless.

The intruder rose smiling. "You don't know me, do you, Miss Anne?" she asked. "I heard Charlie was coming back to Ridgefield and so I told my sister I guessed she'd have to get along without me this winter."

For a second Mrs. Dexter stood spell-bound, evidently struggling with some half-forgotten memory. "If it isn't Lizzie!" she suddenly exclaimed, and to Cary's amazement held both hands impulsively to the new-comer.

"Yes, I'm Lizzie," said the woman, laughing delightedly as she grasped them, "and I'm as strong as ever if I am fifty years old. I know what it is to get any kind of help in Ridgefield, except those untidy French-Canadians from the lower village, and I was sure your city servants wouldn't come, or wouldn't stay if they did come. I know all the ways of the house and unless you and Charlie have completely changed since you were here that summer, and since he was a boy, I guess we can hit it off together. At least, we'll give each other a trial, if so be you're favorable," she ended more cautiously.

“Lizzie, this is the best luck that ever befell us!” exclaimed Mrs. Dexter. “Want you? I should think we did! Cary,” she added, turning to her surprised daughter, “this is Lizzie Phillips, who was with Aunt Nancy for years and years.”

“I worked for Miss Nancy from the time I was seventeen till the day she died,” put in the smiling Lizzie, looking kindly at Cary, and pressing the hand which Cary offered, since it seemed to be expected of her, though a servant of this type had never come her way before. “Then I married Jim Stacy and after three years he died, too. I’ve been with my sister Ruth till now, and I never thought I should take to living out again, but when it comes to Charlie’s family and the old house I know from top to bottom,—why, if you want me, Miss Anne, I guess we can come to terms.”

“*Want* you?” sighed Mrs. Dexter. “Here I have been wondering how in the world I should ever look after this big house. We’ve lived in an apartment so long, and managed with just somebody coming in, or with one maid, who didn’t know how to do much,—oh, Lizzie, it

seems too good to be true! And I never *could* keep house like other people."

Lizzie gave an amused and rather indulgent glance round the disordered room. "I know, Miss Anne, I know. I remember how you had to 'tend to the poppies and run out whenever a thrush called. But you were a good cook," she added kindly.

"Oh, I can cook if I have to," agreed Mrs. Dexter, "but it's the having to that I don't like. And Cary's growing up and she'll want me to be conventional and keep house like other people."

Lizzie laughed. "Never you mind, Miss Anne," she said. "You sit down and paint all the pictures you like. I'll just step out and get word to Ruth to send my trunk along, and then I'll pitch in here and straighten things. What time do you want dinner and have you ordered it?"

Cary left her mother planning eagerly with this welcome visitor from the past, and went on exploring. To have the former servant of the house turn up and wish to share their home-making was a bit of good-luck that Cary natu-

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rally appreciated less than her mother, who already saw the difficulties of getting satisfactory help in a country town. But she was quite unprepared to have her father, on hearing the news, give a shout of real boyish joy and rush for the kitchen to welcome the old-time servant and friend.

Cary continued her explorations. The short hall from the dining-room led to a side entrance, and to the back stairs. The second floor comprised five large sleeping-rooms, the one over the kitchen having no less than six windows, east, west and north. From the twin beds and other articles, Cary saw that her parents had taken this for their own and in the little one adjoining, Christine's tiny possessions were bestowed. Cary looked into a well-equipped bathroom and into a big linen-closet, then inspected anxiously the other rooms, wondering which was meant for her, but before she detected anything to indicate that the matter was settled, her mother came flying up-stairs.

"Oh, you are wondering which is your room. Which do you like best? You are to have your choice."

Cary wandered from one to another of the

three. The two big front rooms had each four windows, the little west one but two. The southeast room possessed a fireplace with fascinating side-cupboards; the one across the hall looked down to the river and the sunset; the little west room had delightful old-fashioned picture paper above a paneled wainscot.

“Which was Daddy’s room?” Cary finally asked.

“The one we have taken,” her mother replied, “the big one over the kitchen.”

This basis of decision rendered useless, Cary inspected the three rooms again. “I’ll take this,” she finally announced, after viewing the southwest one inch by inch. “No, it hasn’t any fireplace, and I know those cupboards are dear, but don’t you see, Mammy, the butterfly is below my window!”

“Of course!” agreed her mother, understanding at once, though to her mind the room was the least attractive of the three. “We will always remember that the butterfly is outside. Muslin curtains will make the windows less stiff and you needn’t have these old pictures unless you like.”

Cary inspected minutely the old-fashioned

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mahogany-framed oil paintings. One represented a ship in a storm tossing violently on petrified high-running waves, another depicted an Arab bestriding a white steed with delicately arched neck and flowing tail. The third was a marvelous combination of high mountain and dashing river with a level field on the edge of a precipice where ladies strolled attired in hoop-skirts, accompanied by gentlemen in tall hats gallantly holding minute parasols over the heads of their companions.

“Mother, I wouldn’t have these taken away for anything!” Cary announced delightedly. “Oh, I know they are dreadful, but somehow they belong here. There’ll be plenty of room for my things, too. Isn’t there any closet? What’s this?”

She dashed across the room to a mountain of mahogany and opened its doors, to disclose two little closets evidently for the reception of garments. The rest of the furniture consisted of an enormous mahogany sleigh bed, a handsome bureau, table, rocking-chair and three straight chairs. Its floor, painted green, was partly covered by matting of a curious and interesting weave.

“The room can be made extremely attractive,” said Mrs. Dexter. “The paper is unobtrusive and the pattern good, while the view is furniture in itself. There’s no running water, Cary, but you can either use your wash-stand or go to the bathroom. Wonderful to say, there is a set-bowl in our room.”

Cary looked at the wash-stand for the first time, saw its glass top over quaint cretonne, its clear glass bowl and pitcher. “I like this, Mammy,” she announced, “only I’m afraid I’ll smash these things.”

“Indeed, you mustn’t,” said her mother. “That toilet set is really choice. You will be careful, won’t you, Cary?”

“Yes, Mammy,” said her daughter promptly. “How could Cousin Anthony not simply *love* this place?” she went on.

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Dexter reflectively. “Your father and he were in college together and I imagine Anthony cared so much for Charles that he would not make a bad matter worse by living here.”

“And what is there in the attic?” asked Cary, as they arrived at the stairs leading to the third story.

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“Two rooms for servants,” replied her mother, “and two storerooms, as I suppose, which seem to be locked, though I expect the keys are on the bunch given us by Anthony’s agent, and a room that was fitted up with tools and used by your father as a workshop. Oh, there is a big water-tank, which has to be filled every other day.”

Cary ran up-stairs, looked into the tool-room, still furnished with bench and vise, and shelves containing boxes of nails and choice bits of wood; peeped into the tank where the water reflected her inquisitive face from its dark surface; tried the two locked doors.

“I suppose that rag doll is shut up behind one of them,” she said as she rejoined her mother. “I’m crazy to see her. May we look for her this afternoon?”

“Why don’t you save both the desk and the attic for a rainy day?” asked Mrs. Dexter.

“Well, I will,” said Cary. “I never was in such a fascinating house before. Isn’t it just lovely, Mammy?”

“Yes, it is,” assented her mother, “and it is exasperating as well, because it is such a combination of things that are really good and beau-

tiful and others that are ugly and comfortable. If only it were truly ours, we could make a charming home of it."

"Ugly!" said Cary, the word recalling something to her mind. "Mammy mine, have you *seen* that High School? And did you ever look upon anything so horrible?"

"The exterior doesn't prevent its being a good school so far as education goes," replied Mrs. Dexter. "And the people here seem to think a great deal of it and to feel so proud of the boys and girls it has sent into the world. Of course it is not like the school you have left but it does rank well. Be careful not to criticize, Cary, especially before you know anything about it. Daddy might feel sensitive, you know, because it is his old school."

A decided premonition that she certainly shouldn't be able to endure that building was creeping over Cary, but there would be time enough to confront that fearful feeling when Monday really came. She slipped out of her traveling suit, and presently, after a bath and fresh clothes, went down to investigate the garden. Through some shrubbery she caught sight of a canoe drawn up on the bank, and at

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once turned in that direction, anxious to discover whether Daddy had thoughtfully provided one for family use.

CHAPTER IV

NEW FRIENDS

THE distance across the lawn to the bank of the river was shorter than Cary anticipated, and she was at the top of the slope, beyond retreat, before she saw that the canoe had just been vacated by two girls of her own age and a boy slightly older. Having dipped a can of water from the river, he was gazing intently into it. At Cary's sudden appearance, both girls turned and the boy looked up.

"Oh, are you Cary Dexter?" asked the taller of the two, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "We were coming to see you this afternoon,—we really didn't intend to call quite so early as this. I'm Janet Chapin, and this is Amy Richards, and her brother Cutler."

Amy smiled and Cutler, lifting a pair of the blackest eyes Cary had ever seen, made her a stiff bow. He was tall, thin, and so alertly poised that he made her think of an Indian. Amy, as Cary found out later, looked like her plump, fair mother. At first sight, strangers

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always refused to believe that the two could be brother and sister.

Janet was not exactly pretty, but as Cary later reported to an interested family, she had "style," and most people found her animated face very attractive, for though her mouth was big, a frequent smile revealed fine teeth and her dark wavy hair parted prettily above eyes that were either hazel, gray, or green according to the light and the frock Janet happened to be wearing.

"I'm ever so glad to see you," said Cary heartily, for she liked the look of all three. "No, I came only this morning, but Mother and Father have been here more than two weeks."

"Yes, we've met them," said Amy. "They were at church Sunday. And I think you will be with Janet and me in the sophomore class. Cutler's a junior."

Cary sat down eagerly on the bank. "Do tell me about that school," she exclaimed. "Is it anything like a city one?"

"Well, I've never been to a city school," replied Amy, looking with admiration at Cary's pretty green linen dress. It was as simple as

her own in cut and material, but somebody's artistic fingers had added a touch of gay embroidery on pockets and belt, giving an air of distinction to a very inexpensive garment. Moreover, it was extremely becoming to Cary's slight figure, her brown hair, and the eyes she scornfully characterized as "yellow."

"It's an uncommonly good school," remarked Cutler suddenly. "Father says it is one of the best in New England."

"But the building looks so *queer* from the outside," said Cary. "Perhaps it's nicer inside."

"Oh, the building,—" said Cutler meditatively. He turned toward Cary and, as she afterwards reported to her mother, looked at her as though she wasn't there. After that one glance, he paid no attention to the girls but went on dipping his tin into the river, looking searchingly at its contents, only to empty it again and repeat the process.

"The building isn't specially nice," said Janet, "but I don't know that I ever thought much about it. People are so pleased that your father has come back as principal. Don't you think you'll like Ridgefield?"

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"Oh, I guess so," said Cary. "What is there to do, outside of school, I mean?"

"A great deal," said Amy. "There's always the river, and picnics and our school entertainments, and a lot going on at the church, and the snow-shoeing and tobogganing are fine in winter. And then we're doing Red Cross work, you know."

"But aren't there any theaters or concerts?" asked Cary.

"N-no," said Amy doubtfully, "only those we get up ourselves. But there are movies once a week, and sometimes they are very good. There are two musical clubs and we do have concerts."

There was just the least little change in Amy's tone as she replied, and Cutler looked up again. Cary suddenly understood. No, she was not going to pose as the sophisticated city visitor who would despise all country amusements. If a thought of the pleasures she was used to in her former home crossed her mind, she could not be blamed for that, but she would not let them know what she was thinking.

"Snow-shoeing?" she repeated. "That'll be fine. And isn't there skating, too, here on the

river? Is it deep enough for swimming?"

"Gracious, yes," said Janet, pushing back her heavy hair. "That is, in spots, and it's best to know how, because when you do upset, you can't always choose your spot. But we skate more often on Crystal Lake, for the ice is smoother. Wouldn't you like to go canoeing with us this afternoon?" she asked. "Amy and I are going up the river to a place where some especially pretty goldenrod grows, to get some for church to-morrow."

"I'd love to," Cary responded promptly. "Oh, I'm quite sure I may. Could you just wait while I run in and ask Mother whether she will want me? I haven't unpacked and things aren't settled, but if she's going to paint, she'll forget about doing anything else."

Cary started on a run for the house, leaving a surprised trio behind her. A mother who stopped to paint, with a partly settled house about her, was new to all. Yet nobody felt critical, for they had seen Anne Dexter's vivid face at church and already recognized the charm of her personality. Her daughter had the same quick way of moving and speaking and possessed a certain daintiness in every action,

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which they were to learn was characteristic of Cary.

Mrs. Dexter assented promptly to the plan. She was anxious that Cary should make friends quickly, and Cary came flying back to report.

"We'll start about three," said Amy, the faint shadow of doubt completely gone from her voice. "We will be paddling upstream anyway and can pick you up here. It's fine that you can go."

The girls stepped back into the canoe and Cutler emptied his tin for the last time.

"Would you mind telling me," Cary asked politely, "what you expect to find in that water?"

Cutler surveyed her with a steady look. In spite of herself, Cary could not keep her lips quite straight, for his performances with the tin can struck her as extremely funny. Cutler had intended to give a plain answer, but something in her expression made him change his mind.

"Not at all," he replied with equal courtesy. "I was looking for the immature forms of *Culex pungens*."

Amy gave a surprised gasp as her brother pushed the canoe from the bank, with a skill-



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WATER?" — *Page 56.*

ful twist that took it full into the current. "You're as bad as Van," Cary heard her protest as they drifted quickly beyond hearing.

"Now, what did I do to make him say that?" thought Cary. "And who is Van?"

Cary found an answer to both questions that afternoon when they had paddled up to a hilly slope rather far above the town, and filled their arms with great feathery bunches of the "prettiest goldenrod in Vermont," as Janet fervently styled it. Cary was not especially experienced in goldenrod, but she admitted it to be very bushy and very golden, and she wished that her mother could see Janet, who happened to be wearing a yellow and white gingham dress, standing in the sunshine with her arms loaded.

Going up the river in itself proved rather exciting, for they took a short-cut through the meadow where the water was shallow, stuck on a sand-bar and had to get out and wade. Cary enjoyed the experience, and pulled off shoes and stockings so promptly that both her new friends dubbed her good sport and were ready before the afternoon shadows grew long, to vote the daughter of the new principal a real acquisition to Ridgefield. As they wandered

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back toward the canoe, Janet stopped to look under a white birch.

“We came up here last July,” she said, “and I found a family of baby hermit thrushes somewhere round here. Ah, here is the empty nest. They were very wide-throated and pin-feathery then, but I suppose that now they are lovely voices in the woods. Oh, Amy, do you remember the whippoorwills?”

“Don’t I!” sighed Amy, with feeling.

“They were dreadful this summer,” Janet went on to Cary. “You’ve heard them, haven’t you, nights in the country? Well, all through July, there were two that came down from the Ridge every night as regular as the clock. One had a pleasant, rather musical voice, and he always came between eight and nine, and we named him Peter Pan. We really enjoyed Peter. But the other was a terrible bird, that got wound up and went on forever. His name was Willful Willie, and he invariably turned up about two in the morning. This sounds like a large story, but truly, one night, by actual count, he shrieked ‘Whip-poor-will,’ fifteen hundred and nine times, with breaks of

only a few seconds between! In one of those pauses, when the sudden silence fairly hurt one's ears, a pewee said '*Please!*' in an almost human tone of protest. But Willie didn't please; he started again. My brother was so exasperated that he shouted 'Shut up!' and woke my little sister, the only person in the house who wasn't already awake. We were all thankful when Willie finally moved on to a different place. Would you like to paddle bow going home?" she ended.

"Oh, I'd love to," said Cary. "Tell me if I don't do it right."

"Let's take this goldenrod right to the church and arrange it now," suggested Amy, as they settled themselves in the canoe, piled high with feathery blossoms.

"And let's hope and pray that after we've put it in vases, Mrs. Baker will let it alone," sighed Janet, as she dipped her paddle. "Last September, Cary, we came for the goldenrod, Amy and I, and arranged it so prettily in church, three brass vases all a wonder of yellow. The altar hangings are green and gold, too, and the whole effect was lovely and artis-

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tic. We were so pleased with it and were looking forward to having people tell us after service how pretty the flowers looked.

“That Sunday,” continued Janet, “I was rather late getting to church and when I came in I had the shock of my life. Poor, dear Mrs. Baker, who is just as good and kind as she can be, had brought a bunch of late gladioli, the ugliest magenta shade you ever saw or can imagine, and substituted it for the center vase of goldenrod. The contrast of colors fairly filled the church and hit everybody on the head. It was terrible. I didn’t dare look across at Amy for a long time.”

“If she’d only taken away all the goldenrod, it wouldn’t have mattered so much,” observed Amy. “It was her leaving any that made it so bad.”

“But why did she change it at all, when you had it arranged?” asked Cary. “Was it any of her business?”

“Oh, well,” said Amy, “strictly speaking, it wasn’t, but what was the use of making a fuss? She thought it was beautiful. And in a little town like this you have to work with all sorts of people in church and not care what they do.

If you stop to care, you'd never get anything done, and Mrs. Baker helps ever so much, really helps, I mean. Janet and I had to swallow our rage and keep still. But it won't happen tomorrow, because Mrs. Baker's bulbs didn't do well."

"She may have some magenta asters," observed Janet gloomily.

"It will be all right if she has," reassured Amy, "for Father knew we were disappointed that time and when I told him we were going to try the goldenrod again, he said he'd have any other flowers that came put on the reading-desk. That's good of Father for he doesn't like a vase there very well, because ever since Van knocked it off, he always expects the choir to tip it over in passing."

"Please, who is Van?" asked Cary.

"My younger brother, Evan," replied Amy with a sigh. Cary soon found that Amy always sighed when she spoke of Van. "He enters High School this fall. He is a very queer boy and a great trial."

"And great fun," put in Janet, smiling. "I can't imagine Ridgefield without Van Richards."

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"It would be something like an animal show with the monkey left out," agreed Amy resignedly.

"Mother often says that Van should have been her child, and May your mother's," said Janet. "Then our home would have been all uproar and the rectory a spot of calm. But Van is a dear,—I'm not going to have him slandered," she ended.

"All the same, Janet, you wouldn't enjoy living with him. Only this morning I opened the refrigerator and right next to the butter dish lay a disgusting dead English sparrow. Van shot it with his air gun and was going to take it over for Ned Babcock's pet fox, but of course he had to put it in the ice chest until he was ready to go. He said Foxy's fresh meat must be kept cool, but Mother made him take it straight out and wash the refrigerator with a disinfectant. Van truly is a dreadful boy."

"I think he must be great sport," laughed Cary. "I've always wished for a brother, but my only one died when he was just a baby and I was too little even to remember him. Is your other brother like Van?"

"No, thank goodness!" said Amy energetic-

ally. "Cutler is like other people. I don't know what made him so impolite to you this morning, Cary. He might just as well have told you that he was looking for mosquito wrigglers. He has some theory about them, what, I don't know, but he goes round hunting everywhere for them. He could have explained, and I told him he was rude."

"Oh, I didn't care," said Cary. "Perhaps he thought I was making fun of him. But to go back to the goldenrod. I still don't see why you should let Mrs. Baker upset your plans and never say one word."

"Well," Janet answered, "Amy couldn't say anything, because being the rector's daughter, she's in a sort of semi-official position, and just then I was feeling sensitive on account of Mrs. Baker's yellow kitten. Will you paddle just a little slower, Cary? It's rather difficult to keep time when you work so fast."

"Her yellow kitten?" repeated the mystified Cary, as she adapted her stroke to Janet's request.

"It was this way," Janet began. "Mr. and Mrs. Baker left town the early part of last Sep-

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tember for ten days and Mrs. Baker asked me to take care of her pet kitten. I said I would and the morning she left she brought it over. It was a dear little thing, just as clean and as pretty as could be and I didn't wonder she thought so much of it. While she was telling me just what it was to have to eat, it wandered out of the room. I didn't think about it, because you have to listen very closely when Mrs. Baker talks, in order to get in the right answer when she does stop. It must have been twenty minutes that we stood in the hall and then she went, and I started to look for the kitten.

"That dreadful little cat," Janet went on impressively, "was in the empty kitchen, all balled up in a sheet of sticky flypaper! And there was Mrs. Baker still in sight from the window! I had a terrible time. I couldn't pull the paper off without taking fur and skin too, and I didn't know what to do. May was so distressed that she was crying; she's only ten years old," Janet explained. "Luckily my brother Arthur came in just then. He had been at Plattsburg all summer and was home for a few days before college began. He thought grease would be the best thing to try, so we

used almost half a can of Crisco on that kitten.

“When we got through, the cat looked like nothing you can imagine, but most of the sticky stuff was off, and it was merely greasy. We were all perfectly exhausted and we put the little thing down cellar and forgot it till Mother came home from Burlington where she’d been shopping. That was about six, and quite soon she asked whether Mrs. Baker brought the kitten. We told her what had happened and she wanted to see it at once, so Arthur went for it.

“The minute he started,” Janet went on with a smile, “I had a sudden conviction that we’d better have put it into the barn or the garage, but it was too late. We heard Arthur laughing in the cellar and then he came up with that terrible little animal. It had gone into the coal-bin, all greasy as it was and it looked like a wet grimy black rat. By the way, its ridiculous name was Shiny Penny.

“May began to cry again, and I felt like it myself,” Janet admitted. “Now, it sounds funny but it was anything but funny then. Mother said Arthur and I were perfectly crazy to have put it in the cellar; Father said we should have used alcohol in the beginning, and

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May fairly howled because she was so sorry for the kitten and she didn't think it would ever be clean again.

"We had a dreadful time. Next morning, Mother and I washed it with soap and water but that didn't seem to make it the original color, and Mother was so afraid it would take cold that we had to rub it with bath towels and keep it in the sun and nurse it generally for hours. But still it wasn't clean. We tried alcohol and that made it sick. May tried to whiten it with the stuff intended for canvas shoes, with the result that it had to be washed again. Arthur said the only solution was to dye it black and return it to Mrs. Baker as the latest fashionable color in cats. Well, to cut a long story short, we worked over that kitten every day Mrs. Baker was gone, and just two hours before she was expected home, we got it so it looked clean and nice as when she brought it. I wonder it survived."

"So do I," laughed Cary.

"It was thin," said Janet, "so we gave it a saucer of cream which puffed it up a good deal. It really was very cunning and was used to being petted, but it was so dirty that we couldn't

enjoy it, and I guess it was as glad to get home as we were to have it go. But you understand now why I didn't feel like saying anything about Mrs. Baker's flowers. That was the Sunday after the kitten went home, you see."

CHAPTER V

RIDGEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

CARY's pleasant afternoon on the river was followed by a pleasant Sunday when she woke to the golden light of a beautiful September morning, with curious reflected waves from the river dancing on the ceiling of her room.

At church, where she went with Mother and Daddy, she found herself looking almost with an air of proprietorship at the flowers in the chancel, feathery plumes above the gold-embroidered green hangings and against the gray-green arch. Mercifully, Mrs. Baker had intruded no other decorations to spoil the charmingly artistic effect, but Cary smothered a smile as she imagined how those magenta gladioli must have looked.

After service, so many people came to greet her parents that it seemed quite as though a reception was going on. Later in the day, such a procession of callers drifted through the com-

bined library and studio, that Cary, kept busy supplying her mother with fresh tea and additional cups, thought gleefully that life in the Butterfly House promised friends and excitement almost equal to the city. And then followed a long delightful evening, while she curled in a corner of the couch before the open fire and listened dreamily while Daddy read poetry aloud.

But Monday morning was a different affair. Cary's worst anticipations were realized when with Amy and Janet she walked up the avenue of pines leading to the High School, appreciating as she did so, the kindness of the girls in stopping for her, lest she feel lonely or left out among the chattering groups.

They took Cary into the building by a basement entrance, leading to a room where outer garments were disposed upon hooks in long rows. At the door stood a pleasant-faced young teacher, directing each student to the section designed for her class. Hanging up wraps took but a second when one had only a light sweater to shed, and Cary had opportunity to notice the worn, discolored floor, and bare walls lighted by small, high windows. It really was

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the "cellar" she styled it, but there was little time for criticism, for the file of girls coming in, left by an opposite door and disappeared up a flight of battered stairs.

Presently Cary found herself on a settee in a big hall and she was justified in thinking it a rather dreadful place, for its walls and ceiling were a distressing shade of blue kalsomine, blistered and flaked with the passing of many years, and further disfigured by a pattern of stenciled scallop-shells, looking exactly like large mustard plasters applied at methodical intervals.

Being only fifteen, Cary did not notice the beautiful view framed by each window, nor appreciate that the pictures hung on their appalling background were fine photographic reproductions, nor realize that the casts at either side of the platform were well-chosen. In fact, her mood of disgust and disappointment deepened till she was engulfed by a great wave of longing for the school exchanged for this.

Yet she had come to Ridgefield determined to make the best of things and to get all the fun and pleasure possible from the experience. Presently she remembered her mother's caution

about judging hastily and began to look about her.

Having never attended a mixed school before, the boys across the aisle came in for a share of her inspection, and presently Cary's spirits began to rise, for both boys and girls bore such scrutiny rather well. Ridgefield boasted not a few families of genuine cultivation, as Cary already knew from the stream of callers flowing through her home on the previous afternoon, people just as delightful as their city friends. Then there were many comfortable, well-to-do families where the children were being given a better chance than their parents, and lastly came pupils from the real country homes, which form the backbone of old New England.

Cary saw frank, manly faces among the boys, attractive girlish ones about her. There was a pleasant spirit of comradeship as of those who knew one another well through both play and work, and in boys and girls alike, there was an absence of self-consciousness that spoke well for the school atmosphere.

Mr. Dexter saw this, though his daughter did not, and his satisfaction with what his experi-

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enced eyes read in the young faces before him, helped him to address the school with genuine interest. At first, Cary listened critically, then with growing admiration. Dad was great fun and good sport as a comrade; she really hadn't known he could talk like this,—hold the attention of every one in the hall. If he succeeded in making the school reach his ideals for the year's work,—why, it might not be such an impossible place after all!

So Cary admitted to herself, and her admiration for her father increased with the passing hours, leaving her to go home at noon much happier than she had thought possible that morning, even ready to admit that the Ridgefield High School had its good points.

Mrs. Dexter awaited rather anxiously her daughter's arrival. Cary would appear, either very enthusiastic or in a fit of the blues, no betweens for her. But she came dancing in after parting with Amy at the gate, in the best of spirits.

"Here I am, Mammy," she called gayly. "Oh, such a funny morning and such a queer school, but I think I shall like it after I get used to all the differences. Daddy was simply great!

You never told me he could talk like that. Why, before he finished, I felt that my one ambition on earth was to be an honored alumnus, or is it alumna?—of the Ridgefield High School. And I like the girls. Janet and Amy introduced me to everybody. Do you know, Janet's brother is in the aviation section? She told me about him at recess and says he writes the most interesting letters. Everybody was nice to me," Cary went on with genuine conviction. "It seems odd to have boys in the classes, but Janet says it makes things more interesting. Somehow I didn't suppose that in a little town like this the teachers would be as good as at home, but every single one is a college graduate, and really nice, our kind, Mammy. And people seem so interested in our being here. I went into the drug-store to buy a toothbrush, and two ladies spoke to me, because they knew I must be Daddy's daughter."

Mrs. Dexter had been working at her easel while Cary chattered, touching with skilled fingers the design for a magazine cover growing upon it. Marriage had not choked her one great talent, only given it opportunity for more luxuriant growth, for she found her husband

willing and glad that she should use her brush, tremendously interested in everything she did, very proud of her accomplishment and her steadily growing artistic reputation. She stood regarding her picture and smiling at her daughter's tale.

"Oh, I'm glad you didn't find things so bad as you feared," she said. "The school plays a big part in the life of a little place like this. I know you will enjoy it, Cary."

The gate clicked and a girl came up the walk, shyly and rather hesitatingly. Mrs. Dexter, casting a glance through the window, stopped, brush poised in her hand.

"Oh, Cary," she said softly, "what a picture! Is she one of the High School students?"

Cary half rose from the couch where she was lounging, and looked at the approaching visitor. "That red-headed girl?" she asked. "Yes, she was in school this morning, for I noticed her hair."

Mrs. Dexter's wide gray eyes were bent on the new-comer, admiration and artistic appreciation plainly indicated by their expression. "Oh, I must paint her!" she exclaimed in a whisper and then her face changed to a smile

of welcome. She moved swiftly forward as the girl paused at the open door.

Candace Halliday, conscious of her cheap, ill-fitting shoes and home-made dress, saw a gracious vision clad in a Dutch blue smock.

"Is Mr. Dexter here?" she began, half-stammering.

"Oh, you wanted my husband? School closed early and he hasn't come yet. I imagine he has been detained. Come in, won't you? Probably you met my daughter this morning."

Cary rose, not with special courtesy, for she saw no reason for Mother's enthusiasm. The girl's hair was pretty,—if you liked that color,—her eyes were unusual and her complexion peachy, but her clothes were simply impossible, and she acted as though she lived in the back-woods.

"I guess I'd better not stop. It was only a book—" hesitated Candace, but while she tarried, a miracle happened, managed by Anne Dexter, who had never been self-conscious in her life. Before Candace knew what was taking place, she was seated in a deep chair, watching with fascinated eyes the careful, sure touches being made to the picture on the easel; telling

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her name and of the little house on Thorn. Then Mr. Dexter came, slamming the front gate and running into the house like a boy.

“Do you know,” he exclaimed as he greeted Candace, “I wanted to speak to you at school this morning but somehow missed you. I’m almost sure you are Andrew Halliday’s daughter.”

“Yes,” replied Candace, coloring so prettily that Mrs. Dexter longed more than ever to transfer her to canvas. “I—I hoped you’d remember him.”

“I’m not likely to forget,” said Mr. Dexter with real feeling. “Andrew and I were fond of each other as boys, and I was truly grieved to know of his death, Candace. You must let us see a good deal of his daughter.”

“Take off your hat, Candace, and stay to lunch with us,” said the wonderful lady with the blue smock and the starry eyes.

“Oh, I—I couldn’t,” stammered Candace, “Granny would worry if I am late. It was only about the books for French—I hope you don’t mind my coming here to ask, but I wanted to know how much it was going to cost?” She rose uneasily.

Mr. Dexter looked puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he said.

"You see," Candace began, "in the second year, you can take French if you want to,—you don't have to. But the French books,—do they cost much?"

Mr. Dexter thought rapidly. As quickly as his wife, he recognized the girl's amazing beauty, saw her poor clothes, but he also read in her eager face and questioning eyes the hunger for knowledge. That morning in the hall he noticed her almost at once, for among eighty girls who sat more or less conscious of their collars, their ribbons and their fresh frocks, this girl with the wonderful hair kept her eyes fixed on his face, unmindful of anything but his words.

"The first book needed will be furnished by the school department," he replied. "The texts used later are issued in cheap paper editions."

"Oh, thank you," said Candace, unconsciously clasping her hands as she spoke. "I wanted so much to study French."

She would not stay for luncheon, much as she really wished to do so, but hurried off, happy in the message for Granny, that Charles Dexter

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was going to climb Thorn to see her just as soon as he could find the time.

"Isn't she the most glorious creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Dexter, laying down her palette. "I shall not rest till I have her on canvas. Oh, but I saw through you, Charles, you fibber! Will your school committee back up your rash promises?"

"They will," replied her husband, laughing. "That's one point on which I'm determined. These children who want to learn are to have the books and the opportunity. Andrew was one of the boys who lacked the full chance of an education, for he couldn't even finish at the old Academy. But he was a fine fellow and if his daughter has inherited his longing for books, I'll help her to the extent of my ability. You shall paint her, Anne."

"Do, Mammy, and incidentally tell her how to dress," said Cary. "She'd be stunning in brown."

"Brown to match her hair, brown with a tinge of gold," mused Mrs. Dexter. "Sea-gray, Cary, a green-gray with a touch of turquoise. Oh, I *should* like to design a dress for her!"

At her mother's enthusiastic tone, Cary

laughed. There were times when she felt years older than either of her parents,—for instance when between them they lost all the latch-keys to the apartment and didn't care in the least. Daddy had then taken the one belonging to the servants' entrance and carefully attached to it a label, "Back Door," in order, so he explained to the wondering Christine, if they lost that as well, the finder could go around trying all the back doors in the world until he found the lock the key fitted.

CHAPTER VI

AUNT NANCY'S SECRETARY

BEFORE two weeks passed, Cary concluded that the Ridgefield High School promised to prove as interesting as the one she left. There was a certain charm about small classes, an intimacy not possible in large sections, and it was fun gradually to know every student in the school, not merely those of one's own division. Though the building left much to be desired in the way of beauty, its equipment was adequate and the shabby old rooms decidedly comfortable. Cary, used to a locker for her personal possessions and to journeys, sometimes long, about a big building to attend classes, was amused to find herself at an assigned desk in a large school-room, expected to be at said desk unless occupied by some recitation. The classrooms afforded only settees where one must take notes with book resting on a knee, instead of the latest and most comfortable design of

desk-chair, but the notes themselves seemed quite as well worth the putting down as in the larger institution. Sooner than she would have thought possible, Cary found herself accepting the situation happily, found her recollections of the Girls' High School growing dim.

Not a little of her contentment was due to her having so quickly found congenial friends. Though for a time she missed keenly the chums of the previous year, she liked Janet thoroughly and without reserve. Amy, she found a little harder to get acquainted with, not realizing that Amy, who had known and loved Janet all her life, found it difficult to share her friend even with so attractive a girl as Cary Dexter.

"We shall have a sophomore class-meeting soon," Amy observed one day when she and Cary were sauntering homewards up Main Street, after leaving Janet at her gate. "It is high time we chose our officers. Janet stands a good chance of being president, unless Ned Babcock is elected. They spoke of you for secretary."

"Really?" said Cary, secretly much pleased. After the excitement of being president for one year, the prospect of holding office, even in a

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small high school, seemed pleasant. "Who suggested me?"

"I heard the girls talking about it and Van said Alex Lincoln spoke of several boys who wanted you. I think you'll be up for something, Cary, for you see everybody knows you because of your father. Dear me, I wish I wasn't so scared of him!"

"Afraid of Daddy?" said Cary in real amazement.

"Well, he isn't *my* father, you see. And I'm so stupid in algebra. I made such a mess of my problem this morning."

"So did I," Cary acknowledged. "I'm not so quick in mathematics as I ought to be. But Daddy explained it to you."

"I know he did," said Amy. "He didn't make me feel an insignificant worm either, the way Miss Hathaway does. She glares so if the least little Latin ending is wrong."

"She's a very fine teacher, though," said Cary, who happened to be good at languages. "Much better than the one who taught Latin in my last school."

"I heard her having a row with Van this morning," sighed Amy. "He sits in her room,

and I'm sorry for her. I was passing the door and heard her say: 'Evan Richards, stop talking and get into your desk this minute!' "

"I suppose he was out of order," said Cary, laughing as she spoke, for like Janet, she found Amy's young brother most amusing. Van possessed an animated, dark face that could be either a living question-mark, or an absolute blank according to the needs of the moment. Overgrown, awkward and painfully thin, though his distressed mother did her best to satisfy an appetite that could consume any kind and any amount of food, Van looked as though a strong wind had shaped his contours.

"No doubt he was doing something he shouldn't," Amy agreed, "but he replied as sweet as honey, 'Why, Miss Hathaway, I couldn't possibly get into my desk!' "

"Of course she should have said 'seat,' " agreed the amused Cary. "What happened then?"

"She laughed; she couldn't help it," replied Amy gloomily. "Van does say such queer things. The freshmen are having Greek history and mythology and they came to where Perseus changes the sea-monster into stone by

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showing him the head of Medusa. Van told Miss Appleton that Perseus missed the chance of his life by not hanging on to that head, merely as a business proposition. He could have made all the statues he wanted just by freezing into marble every good-looking person he met, and since they would be much more natural and life-like than any sculptor,—even Phidias,—could carve, Perseus might have made a great deal of money. I heard about it afterwards,” Amy concluded. “I always do hear all the strange things Van says. Everybody takes pleasure in saving them up to tell me.”

“But that was clever,” laughed Cary.

“Clever, yes,” Amy assented, “but I’d be satisfied if he wasn’t so clever. Cary, did you ever *see* such a shark at lessons as Candace Halliday? Is there anything she doesn’t learn better than all the rest of us?”

“She is a wonder,” Cary agreed. “I never saw any one so anxious to know the least little reference in every lesson. To-day when we were reading Tennyson’s ‘Dream of Fair Women,’ I believe Candace was the only person in class who had traced every single allusion,

even the ones to Queen Eleanor and Jephthah's daughter."

"Yes," said Amy, "and she learned *three* of Wordsworth's sonnets, learned them just because she wanted to, while the rest of us thought ourselves abused at having to memorize one."

"I didn't mind that," replied Cary. "Daddy loves poetry and is always reading it aloud. I like to learn it,—I often do,—just for pleasure."

"I wish now that I hadn't chosen the sonnet I did," observed Amy thoughtfully. "I learned the one beginning: 'The world is too much with us,' and I like yours better."

"Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee:—"

quoted Cary. "But, Amy, I haven't any special claim on it; it isn't my personal property; you may learn it, too."

"Well, do you know it hadn't occurred to me that I could," said Amy, laughing. "I believe I will. O dear, it's sprinkling and I know there will be another shower! No, I won't stop for an umbrella. I'll use my coat-collar for one and run between the drops."

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Amy hurried down the street and Cary turned in at the Butterfly House. Though she really should not complain of the first showery day since she came to Ridgefield, her spirits suddenly fell. No game of tennis this afternoon, no canoeing on the autumn river where at every bend the maples "changed from glory into glory."

At luncheon Cary related Van's opinion of the excellent business opportunity neglected by Perseus, a tale which brought an amused laugh from both father and mother.

"Clever child, Van," commented Mr. Dexter.

"Amy does take him so desperately hard," said Cary. "She never sees how bright and funny he is. Janet thinks Van is a dear and so do I."

"He is attractive," replied her father. "A pity that his parents regard him so seriously, for a boy like Van needs a lot of letting alone. He certainly doesn't shine in mathematics, but to me, he and Candace Halliday are the two students in school that, so far, stand out above all others."

"Could I mention that for Amy's comfort?" asked Cary saucily.

"Not spoken for publication," replied her father merrily. Their understanding was that Daddy should be perfectly free to talk about his work at home and that Cary should regard every such comment as confidential.

"Well, all right," said his daughter. "I only thought it might cheer Amy. Do you know, Mammy, what I'm planning to do this afternoon while it rains? Explore the old secretary."

"And find something nobody else could?" teased her father.

"I might," said Cary stoutly. "If I were a girl in a book, I should, of course. But I won't expect to, and then I'll be surprised if I do."

When Cary entered the study about three, it was empty, for Mr. Dexter had returned to school for a teachers' meeting.

"First I shall look through the drawers," she decided, after a survey of the old secretary. No doubt that in itself it was a valuable piece of furniture, made in days when a craftsman wrought lovingly and honestly at his art. The recessed front of each drawer was cut from a solid slab of mahogany that in the beginning must have been three inches thick, to permit the

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deep gouge. Hand-carved claw-feet supported the desk, while sides and drop-front alike were magnificent slabs of handsome wood.

“The thing must weigh a ton,” thought Cary, finding a single drawer no light load.

The top one was empty save for a pile of old photographs and an album of faded kodak pictures. At this Cary glanced with interest, recognizing, in some of the groups, her father as he looked years ago. Some day she would examine the book with greater care.

The second drawer held an old map mounted on cloth and tightly rolled, a map of Ridgefield very early in its history. The third was empty. The fourth and lowest revealed a miscellaneous collection of objects from old buttons to a glass-covered box of mounted butterflies.

Cary went through this accumulation with fruitless care, ending by removing all four drawers from their slides, heavy as they were, and examining the back of the cavity. It appeared perfectly solid, with nothing that invited further investigation.

Having replaced the ponderous drawers, Cary pulled out the brass-knobbed supports to hold the lowered lid. The desk opened upon a

number of small drawers with pigeon-holes above, and in the center a little cupboard between delicate colonial pilasters.

The small drawers held a rusty key or two, a few old-fashioned marbles that perhaps had once been treasured by little Charles Dexter, an envelope stuffed with old postage-stamps, undoubtedly of value to a collector, two account-books recording household expenses, a tiny bottle half full of mercury, a foot-rule, and a puzzle made of metal rings.

The pigeon-holes contained several packages of old letters, doubtless already carefully examined, and bundle after bundle of receipted bills. Nowhere did Cary find anything of interest.

Last of all she opened the little cupboard. Inside was a tiny drawer and above it an empty space. The drawer held a quantity of loose pink coral beads.

Certainly Cary found nothing to explain in the least why the secretary had been Aunt Nancy's only bequest to her nephew and adopted son. But Daddy had spoken of three secret drawers.

After experimenting for half an hour, Cary

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found one, in the little center cupboard where a blank front could be moved by fingers applied to what, while apparently the top of the cupboard was really the bottom of the drawer. In it was a single internal revenue stamp issued during the Civil War.

Cary could not find the other secret drawers, though both were in plain sight. She marveled over her blindness, when her mother, coming to see how her exploration was progressing, touched one of the little pilasters. Cary immediately discovered it to be the front of a very narrow drawer, the height of the column and the depth of the desk, but both pilaster drawers were empty.

“Oh, what did Great-aunt Nancy mean?” sighed Cary, resting her elbows on the shabby old blotter fastened to the desk lid.

“Nobody knows,” said her mother rather soberly, “and it is no use to wonder or to care about it now. Something must have gone wrong with whatever plan she made, for I know she never meant things to come out as they did. She was too fond of Charles for that.”

Mrs. Dexter went on into the library but Cary continued to sit looking into the garden, wet

with the passing shower, though the sun now shone. She was disappointed over her fruitless search, for though she did not like to admit it, a little hope had lingered that the old desk might give up some secret.

Through the open window drifted the pleasant scent of wet pine needles, for the day was warm as spring, and the air full of nice earthy odors. After a little Cary closed the desk and went into the adjoining room. There seemed nothing further to do or say about Aunt Nancy's secretary and she would take the opportunity to consult her mother concerning another project.

"I do think it is so queer," she began, settling herself in a corner of the couch, "that we haven't a single boy related to us, who is in service."

"It is unusual," agreed Mrs. Dexter, already intent on her drawing-board.

"Of course," Cary went on reflectively, "Uncle Jack's children are too young to go, but I haven't even a second cousin in the army. It is so much more interesting to knit for somebody real than to turn things over to the Red Cross for people you never saw and who never

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saw you. Now, Mammy, please listen to me. Mayn't I adopt a soldier to write to and do things for? Janet has her brother Arthur, and Amy's cousin Clive is in the navy."

Mrs. Dexter smiled but made no immediate answer.

"If I had a brother or a cousin or somebody I knew, I would be satisfied," Cary went on. "But all my friends in town are too young to volunteer. Really, I don't know anybody, not even the boys Daddy knows, and he said he could count over seventy. Ever so many girls are doing it, Mammy, and I'm crazy to adopt a war son."

Mrs. Dexter laid down her crayon and looked whimsically at her daughter. "A mother of sixteen to a son of twenty-two or more?" she asked merrily. "Oh, Cary dear, I know how you feel, but I wouldn't like my little girl to be writing to a boy she didn't know."

"It seems as though war made it different, Mammy," pleaded Cary. "Of course, I wouldn't do it any other time, but it's a way to help."

"I don't doubt there are cases where it would help, but I think it is an unwise thing for any

young girl to do. Those letters should be written by older women, by women really old enough to mother a lonely boy."

"O dear!" moaned Cary. "Mrs. Chapin said she didn't think you'd want me to do it. She won't let Janet even put notes in the things she knits, because Kitty Metcalf stuck one into some socks she made and the man who got them wrote right off and asked her to marry him. It would be so romantic to get a proposal from a man you never even heard of! Janet and Amy and I thought it was most interesting, but Kitty was very disgusted. I guess Kitty might have liked it better if she wasn't already engaged to Anson Brooks."

"Very probably," agreed her amused mother. "Cary, do you remember Madam Hosmer? She adopted a war son, and in his reply to her first letter, he addressed her as 'Dearest Sylvia' and asked if she would visit a cabaret with him. Madam Hosmer, old enough to be his grandmother!"

"That *was* rather fresh," Cary acknowledged, "but there must be *some* nice boys, Mammy, who wouldn't take advantage."

"Of course there are, any number of them.

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Only the really nice ones might themselves feel scruples about corresponding with strangers."

"Kitty was so funny about that note," Cary went on after a pause. "She said it was the second time it had happened to her. Once she bought a shirt-waist in a big store in Boston and pinned inside the sleeve was a type-written letter from a man, asking the purchaser of the blouse to write him with a view to matrimony. He told about himself and said he owned an automobile and a summer cottage at the seashore. That was three years ago, and Kitty was crazy to answer it then,—not give her real name, you know, but just see what would come of it,—but Mrs. Metcalf wouldn't let her. Mothers seem to be alike when it comes to really exciting and romantic things," Cary ended rather resentfully. "Of course Mrs. Metcalf was right about that, but it does seem as though war made things different.

"But Mrs. Chapin said," Cary finally went on, "that if I chose to knit an aviator's helmet for Arthur, she knew he would be pleased to have me send it because he always likes Janet's friends. Amy is knitting socks for her cousin

Clive, and Janet says she'll let me help knit for Arthur."

"Indeed you may," agreed Mrs. Dexter cordially. "Make the helmet by all means and send a nice little letter with it. I'm perfectly willing you should do that."

"But I don't know Arthur any more than any other boy," observed Cary.

"But you know his family and his home. I quite approve that plan."

"Well-l," said Cary dubiously, "I suppose I could try it. Of course it isn't as good as having a war son, but it's better than nothing. What are you making, Mammy?" she added, coming to look over Mrs. Dexter's shoulder. "Oh, isn't that lovely! I *wish* I could draw. It's terrible to have a mother who can act and sing and draw and paint and who always says the right thing to the right person, and a father who jokes and writes books, and not do anything at all myself!"

"Oh, honey, don't make up your mind that you never will. It takes time to find the way one can best express one's self. To whom is Chrissy talking?"

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“Is she eating her supper in the dining-room?” asked Cary, going to the door. “Good gracious! Get out!”

At her daughter’s startled tone, Mrs. Dexter put down her crayon and followed. Before her low table by the open window sat little Christine. On the table edge perched an enormous black bird, eating most appreciatively from the hospitable spoon Chrissy extended. As mother and sister watched, she refilled the spoon from her bowl of bread and milk, to offer it again to her visitor.

“It’s a tremendous crow,” said Mrs. Dexter in a whisper. “How tame it is! It must be somebody’s pet.”

“Chrissy doesn’t seem in the least surprised to have it there,” giggled Cary. “Wouldn’t you think she’d be afraid?”

“I suppose she doesn’t see anything strange in its coming to share her supper. Children live so in a world of their own. After all the fairy stories we tell her I suppose Chrissy thinks this only natural.”

For fully five minutes they watched the pretty picture of little Chrissy and the big black crow, most amiably sharing a meal, Christine talking

earnestly all the time. Then a door slammed in the kitchen ell and the intruder flew out of the window.

Christine gazed after him, a troubled expression on her face. "My silver spoon," she murmured. "Big bird took my silver spoon."

"Mother, he *has* taken her silver spoon," exclaimed Cary. "He is sitting up there in the pine with it in his beak. Watch him while I get my rubbers and run out."

High in the branches sat the intruder, holding the spoon safely. Cary threw up a pine cone, but the crow was evidently too tame and too much of a pet to be disturbed by such a missile, especially when it did not come anywhere near hitting him. Looking sideways at Cary, he transferred the spoon to the hold of one claw.

Lizzie came from the kitchen to look and exclaim in surprise, while Christine, distressed by the shocking conduct of her guest, began to cry.

"He'll drop it some time," said Lizzie comfortingly. "I can't be sure it'll be here, though," she added to Cary. "You'd better be ready to follow when he flies."

Fortunately the crow seemed to have lost interest in his treasure. In a moment he spread

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his wings for flight and the spoon fell unheeded to the ground.

“Well, wasn’t that funny!” exclaimed Cary, restoring her property to Christine. “Do you suppose he’ll come again?”

“Very likely if he is somebody’s pet and lives near here,” replied Mrs. Dexter. “We were lucky to get the spoon so easily.”

“He’s been round before,” remarked Lizzie, who had followed Cary into the dining-room. “I think he’s visited my chamber, too, for somebody or something ate half a cake of camphor-ice on my wash-stand and threw my kid curlers out of the window. I thought maybe Chrissy did it, so I didn’t mention it, but I think now it was that crow.”

CHAPTER VII

A COMMITTEE MEETING

As Amy prophesied, the sophomores shortly held a class-meeting, at which Janet was chosen president, Ned Babcock treasurer, and Cary secretary. A few thought Cary should be president, but the majority were loyal to Janet and confident of her level-headed wisdom. They said, too, and with justice, that Cary was a newcomer and it would be unfair to make her president because of her father's position.

But Cary was perfectly satisfied to be secretary and her modest little speech of acceptance went far toward removing any prejudice against her, for the voting had not been unanimous. To her surprise and wholly without her knowledge, Candace Halliday was nominated and ran a close second. In fact, more boys voted for Candace, while the girls, other qualifications being equal, permitted Cary's dainty frocks and greater social adaptability to turn the scale.

Candace did not care at all. It would have been better for her had she been elected and thus forced into closer relation with her fellow students, for she was decidedly inclined to ignore the social side of school life, so intent was she upon getting every possible advantage from her work. So quickly did she condemn perfectly natural youthful enthusiasms as "silly" that she was in danger of becoming a prig.

The High School as a whole promptly discovered the charm of their principal's wife, and a steadily increasing number of boys and girls began to worship her in secret and to make her the central figure whenever she appeared at any school exercise or entertainment. Therefore it was not surprising that the committee appointed by the sophomores to get up a class frolic for Hallowe'en that must be original, good fun and inexpensive, should turn to Mrs. Dexter for advice, though they felt justified in asking because Cary was one of the committee. Candace was on it also, much against her will, for she and Larry Woods had been designated to help the class officers.

"Nothing is cheap," sighed Janet, "and it's hard to think of anything original. There are

A COMMITTEE MEETING 101

just the old Hallowe'en stunts we've done forever."

The committee, in session in the living-room of the Butterfly House, all looked serious.

"Well," observed Cary, "Daddy quoted something the other day about love and jokes still being cheap; we can do things ourselves and make our own fun."

"You've never tried to decorate that old hall," said Ned. "Do you think your mother would have any ideas about it, Cary?"

"I know she will," replied Cary. "I've never yet asked her anything that she didn't rise to the emergency. I'll go and consult her."

"About the refreshments," said Larry, when Cary had gone. "We can't have much because there's so little sugar. People used to give us cake and candy and all sorts of stuff."

"We will just do without," said Janet sensibly. "We ought not to care, either, because we are helping save food. But we can have things that are all right for us to use. There is sweet cider."

"Yes," said Ned quickly, "and apples and chestnuts, though they're both as old as the hills."

"We might have gingerbread," observed Candace shyly. A limited bill of fare was no novelty to her. So far, war had not reduced in the least the few staples she and Granny depended on.

"Ginger cookies made with molasses," amended Janet. "Cookies are easier to handle, Candace. And, well,—that's enough. We ought to be satisfied with that and we can eat it with a clear conscience. Doughnuts would be nice, but of course they take both fat and sugar. We will appoint certain girls to make cookies."

"I can bring some chestnuts," offered Candace.

"And we can easily get the apples and cider," said Larry. "Ned and I'll be responsible for those. That feed is as good as anybody could want, even though it antedates the Revolutionary war. But the entertainment stumps me."

Cary came back smiling. "Mother told me at once what we can do, and I'm sure it has never been seen in Ridgefield before. She suggests that we trim the hall with boughs of evergreen, ever and ever so much, and have an owl hunt."

A COMMITTEE MEETING 103

The other members of the committee looked their amazement.

“Everybody will have a tiny wooden gun,” explain Cary, “which the boys can whittle out of shingles. It will be hardly any work to make them. Hidden all about the room will be lots and lots of little paper owls. Mother will draw patterns for them and help make them. Each owl will have a hole punched in it and a string tied to it, so the person who shoots the owl can hang it on his gun. Gray owls count five, screech owls ten, barred owls fifteen, and great white ones twenty. The best hunter will receive a prize.”

Overcome by the superlative originality of this entertainment, the committee gazed at one another in silence.

“After the hunt,” Cary went on, “she suggests that we play games for a while, games that everybody knows, and then dance.”

“Splendid!” exclaimed Janet. “Only some of the class don’t dance.”

Candace drew a little breath. She for one hadn’t the least idea how.

“Mother thought of that and says we might have a big kettle of molasses or maple syrup

boiling on the gas stove in the teachers' rest-room and those who don't dance can make candy. Then we will serve the refreshments. All this is, if we really don't want any of the regular Hallowe'en doings."

"We don't," announced the committee in unison, save Candace, who was silent. Ned, twirling his cap in his hands, suddenly threw it up and caught it again.

"And *look* at the absolute simplicity of it all!" he ejaculated.

After numerous details had been discussed and arranged, Ned and Larry went away. Janet, too, discovered the hour, but as she rose to go, Candace, who had taken almost no part in the discussion of various matters, suddenly spoke.

"Janet, I wish you'd put somebody else in my place. I'm no good at this sort of thing and I can't come that evening, anyway."

Both Janet and Cary stared at her.

"I can't," Candace went on hastily. "I couldn't get home that night and it would be too hard for Granny to see to things next morning."

"Candace!" exclaimed Cary, looking dis-

tressed. "Oh, what will Mother think of me! When I went up to ask her for ideas, she told me to be sure to say to you that she wanted you to stay here that night. She spoke of it especially but I forgot. Surely your grandmother won't mind being alone just for once. And couldn't Billy Park see about the milk?"

Candace's white face flushed. "That's lovely of Mrs. Dexter. I suppose Billy would go up, but—" she ended miserably, "the real reason is that I haven't anything to wear."

Both girls were dumb before this blunt statement. In their happy, sheltered lives, new, pretty garments appeared whenever needed, as surely as proper food.

"Candace, you look so nice in that dress. Truly it doesn't matter what you wear," Janet began, longing to offer one of her own frocks but restrained by innate delicacy from a suggestion that might hurt Candace's pride.

"It doesn't matter much at school, but this is different," said Candace, not knowing how to put into words her feeling that in class, fine scholarship placed her on an equality with all.

"Clothes don't matter," Janet began again, but suddenly stopped. When one is only fifteen

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she knew they did matter, and mattered very much. "Candace, you *shall* come!" she broke out. "We'll have some Hallowe'en stunts after all and you shall be a witch in costume and tell fortunes."

"In a cave of pine boughs with the biggest owl of all over the entrance," Cary added, clapping her hands enthusiastically.

"And Amy's black cat, if we can persuade him to stand so much society," Janet struck in.

Candace's eyes filled, as she looked from one to the other.

"Say yes," Cary went on. "Mother will plan a costume and help you make up fortunes."

"Why, you'll have the chance of your life," seconded Janet. "Just think how you will know everybody who comes to you and can slam them right and left. But, Cary, why not have all the committee in costume? That will be more fun yet, for then people won't know who is the witch. You and I can think of some disguise."

"Let's," agreed Cary. "But will the boys dress up?"

"Larry will, and we can coax Ned into it.

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We may have to make their costumes, though. You'll do it, won't you, Candace?"

Having had time to recover her poise, Candace agreed. "It's dear of you two to plan a way out, but this will come up again and again, so you might just as well face the fact that I can't do what the rest of the class can, because, well—I'm as poor as Job's turkey and that's all there is to it."

"When the next difficulty comes, we'll get out of that, too," declared Janet. "No use worrying till the time comes. All you'll need will be a black skirt and shawl, and we'll make a pointed cap from cardboard."

"There are some wigs in Mother's treasure chest," said Cary. "Candace's hair would give her away. Oh, we'll make a fine witch of you, never fear. And you're to stay with us over night, Candace."

After a few minutes Candace went away, leaving Janet and Cary to draw long breaths of relief. "Wasn't that a fix!" sighed Janet. "We were up against it with a vengeance, but I flatter myself that we scraped out rather well."

"Because you thought so quickly," said Cary generously. "I wish there was some way for

Candace to have a really pretty dress. I love my clothes and it doesn't seem fair. But, Janet, did you know what that old wet-blanket of a teacher, Miss Pollard, said? She thinks we ought not to have any parties during war-time."

"O dear!" sighed Janet. "I can't feel that it's wrong to have *some* fun and good times."

"I told Daddy and he said, 'Nonsense,' and that it was perfectly natural for us to want our frolic and he thought it right that we should have it. He said it was a duty to be cheerful and for us to have our party, only to keep it simple and inexpensive. Janet, do telephone home and then stay to supper with me, because we must plan what we will wear and think of some costumes that we can induce those boys to get into."

"I can suggest something right away," said Janet. "You and I will be witches, too; we'll have one white, one gray and one black. And the boys shall be goblins. Larry will love to be a goblin."

CHAPTER VIII

A HUNTING CHAPTER

OWLS of every known and some of unknown species, varying in size from wee ones half an inch high to the bird three feet tall, presiding over the witch's retreat, perched among the pine and bitter-sweet decorations of the High School hall that Hallowe'en night. They swung from electric lights, lurked in the slats of the inner shutters, and the choicest specimen of all, a "Great Downy," exactly one inch long, remained unshot until almost the end, when Johnny Chadwick's bright eyes discovered it, neatly suspended by a bit of gum behind the pedal of the grand piano, and with it won the score for marksmanship:

Of course there had been accidents, misunderstandings and hurt feelings as always happens when any number of people, young or older, try to put through a public entertainment, but in the end all the thin ice was successfully skated, every difficulty overcome,—a result largely due

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to Janet's sense of fairness and her even temper. From start to finish, the whole evening finally went smoothly, and everybody had so much fun, that the "owl hunt" was unanimously declared the most successful party ever provided by the Ridgefield High School.

Cloaked in her disguise, Candace forgot her scorn of all frivolities, forgot herself and thoroughly enjoyed reading the palms of her mystified schoolmates, and poking sly and sometimes pointed fun at their foibles. Though they knew the fortune-teller with her disguised voice must be one of three girls, knew her interpretations sprung from close class-room association, it was comical what ridiculous importance they attached to these prophecies.

Candace's happy mood lasted through the evening, kept her excited and gay while she and Cary undressed in adjoining rooms in the Butterfly House, chatting and laughing till both were ready for bed. As she finally put out the light, Candace's last thought was for the pleasure of waking next morning in that pretty room, and of pretending it was really hers, instead of getting up before dawn at call of a relentless alarm clock under the cottage eaves on Thorn.

Candace's actual awakening differed from her anticipations. More tired than she realized after her unusual evening, she slept late, and the sun had been shining some moments when she was abruptly startled into full consciousness by a shriek from Cary's room.

Jumping out of bed, Candace rushed to the adjoining door. Cary, sitting up in bed, was aiming a slipper at a big black bird promenading calmly over her bureau.

"Oh, the horrid thing!" she exclaimed. "Chrissy thinks he's beautiful and Daddy says he's probably a fairy prince in disguise, but I will *not* have him in my room. He can take himself and his magic out of here."

The crow paid no attention to Cary's slipper, rebounding from the front of the bureau. The second one also missed him and went through the open window.

"Suppose somebody was going by and saw that slipper come flying out!" laughed Candace.

"It would be worse if it hit him on the head," observed Cary, rolling her handkerchief into a ball and throwing that at the crow. Then, having nothing else in reach that could be used as a weapon, she lay down.

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“Well, stay if you want to. Come, get into bed with me, Candace. You’ll take cold.”

Candace colored, painfully conscious of her plain cheap nightdress. She could see how it contrasted with Cary’s.

“I think I’d better dress,” she said, feeling suddenly shy again. “It’s after seven.”

“Gracious!” Cary moaned. “I suppose I might as well get up too, even though it is Saturday and no school. Will *anything* make that bird go?”

“I’ll shoo him out,” said Candace, suiting the action to the word, and kindly closing the window as well. The great crow flapped heavily into a neighboring tree, with a parting caw that sounded like a hoot of derision.

Somehow the enchantment of last evening no longer held. Candace knew the room she occupied was still pretty and charming, but her pleasure in it was gone. Last night, without a touch of envy, she admired Cary’s gay kimono and dainty toilet articles, but with the morning she could see only the violent contrast of her own belongings. Cary, too, seemed to be experiencing a reaction, for her conversation was mostly a running complaint because the water

was cold, her hair tangled, her nail-cleaner mislaid, and her pet smock torn.

The two were barely ready when the bell for breakfast rang, where Candace appeared silent and awkward, partly because she so admired both Cary's parents and was overcome at being their guest, partly because she was unaccustomed to the little refinements of Anne Dexter's table. She did not notice the proper spoon to use for her orange, wiped her fingers on her napkin before discovering her finger-bowl, almost upset her chocolate and did spill her egg. In vain she kept telling herself that these trifles did not matter, that because for two months she had ranked the entire High School, she was exempt from bothering over such insignificant details, but in her heart she was mortified over her clumsiness.

The family conversation as well amazed her. Had it passed between people she admired less she would have condemned it as utterly frivolous. She and Granny never had time or spirits to joke and the Dexters joked all the time. During the recent twenty-four hours, Candace's theories of the world received several jolts.

"Candace, are you in a hurry to get home?"

Mrs. Dexter asked as they rose from the table. "If not, will you do me a great favor?"

"I should love to do anything for you," said Candace with genuine feeling. "If I am home by noon, Granny won't worry."

"I very much want to make a little sketch of you,—” began Mrs. Dexter, but stopped to laugh at Cary's tragic moan and the manner in which she dropped limply into a chair.

"I knew it," groaned Cary. "I knew by your eyes, Mammy, that you had designs on Candace. That means that your abused daughter dusts three, no, four rooms."

"A terrible task," agreed her mother. "But I really must have Candace in color. I have planned just how to pose her. It won't be hard, Candace; I only want you to sit in a big chair in a certain attitude, reading any book you choose."

Candace was only too willing to oblige and, ever after, connected the sophomore owl hunt with Macaulay's "Lays," for on that memorable morning she made the acquaintance of Horatius and the "noble river that rolls by the towers of Rome."

Utterly oblivious of all about her, blind to

Mrs. Dexter's quick appraising glances, ignorant of the progress of the sketch, Candace read on, an excited witness of the keeping of the bridge and of the battle by the Lake Regillus. Not until the Great Twin Brethren rode through Rome with news of victory did Candace draw a long sigh and realize that the poem was ended and the clock striking eleven.

"Don't be troubled, Candace," said her hostess, noticing her disturbed expression. "Mr. Dexter is going to take you home in the car. Come and see my sketch."

"Do I really look like that?" Candace asked in astonishment.

"Something like it, I hope," said Mrs. Dexter, much amused. From Candace's tone she could not tell whether the opinion was favorable or the reverse. So completely absorbed had the girl been in her book, that her whole attitude was unconscious. This self-forgetfulness and her lovely coloring Mrs. Dexter had successfully transferred to canvas. The rest of the figure, dress, chair and background were as yet only roughly indicated.

"I can put those in later," the artist explained, not wishing to say in so many words

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that she wanted to paint Candace in the blue-gray dress she always visualized her as wearing.

Mr. Dexter brought the car to take Candace home and offered to take his daughter as well, but Cary said she was busy and that it looked like rain. She flattened her nose against the window and waved her hand rather listlessly to her guest as the machine started.

"Are you tired, dear?" asked her mother, noticing her attitude.

"Oh, a little," replied Cary. "I'm sort of disappointed in Candace. She limbered up last night and was no end of fun like other people, but this morning she shut up again just like a clam. She can talk about books we are studying at school, but she doesn't care about other things we do. And wasn't she embarrassed at breakfast?"

"Candace has the instincts of a lady," said Mrs. Dexter, scraping her palette, "and when one has that, the necessary polish is soon gained. Given the chance, she would quickly become more at ease in company and acquire the little social graces she lacks."

"Well-l, perhaps," agreed her daughter,

“but, Mammy, I don’t think she considers them necessary. Sometimes it seems as though she rather looks down on the rest of us because we fuss over our clothes and such things.”

Mrs. Dexter was silent. How could she explain to Cary that this attitude was doubtless the shield for Candace’s pride?

“Candace is a very interesting girl,” she remarked at length, “and her opportunities in life have been so limited that she has done wonders with what she has.”

“She is doing awfully well in French,” said Cary. “*Very* well, I mean, Mammy,—you needn’t squint at me. But I believe I should like her better if she made more mistakes. Do you know, I think I will go and look in the attic for that rag doll you told me about. Chrissy ought to have her if she’s ever going to. Come up too and explore with me. It’s really **rain-**ing now and you’ve painted for a long time.”

“Well, I will,” agreed her mother. “I suppose the keys to those closed rooms are on the bunch of keys in your father’s desk. Look in the upper left-hand drawer.”

The rain was falling steadily on the slate roof of the Butterfly House when the two reached the

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attic, its beating, though less audible than on shingles, filling the air with a pleasant hum that emphasized the coziness indoors. Almost the first key Cary tried fitted one door. It opened upon a small dark room, shelved on three sides and on the fourth showing a place about a yard high that led under the eaves.

The explorers had provided a lantern and its light revealed upon the shelves any quantity of glass jars, a whole row of gilt bird-cages, outdated kitchen utensils, old lamps, discarded ornaments, and a big pile of quilts. Under the lower shelves were two old-fashioned leather trunks, covered with cowhide and ornamented by brass nails tracing initials on the covers.

One contained a quantity of baby clothes, old and yellowed, of a fashion years gone by, made with the most exquisite material and embroidery. The other held several ancient striped silk and satin dresses, and a pair of white slippers that probably once graced the feet of a bride.

“We will dress up in these some day,” exclaimed Cary, admiring especially a yellow silk dotted with tiny pink rosebuds. “And here is a white coal-scuttle bonnet.”

Having looked through the trunks, she took the lantern and knelt before the opening under the eaves. As far as she could see were only dusty fire-irons, an old flax wheel, a tin reflector used for baking before an open fire, and some big milk-cans.

“Cary, it isn’t worth while crawling in there and getting yourself all dusty,” remonstrated her mother. “I am very sure the doll is in a trunk. Let us look in the other attic.”

Cary obediently backed out the few steps she had entered and they unlocked the second room. This was not wholly dark, since a small window was set high in the passage wall.

“This is surely the hospital for broken furniture,” laughed her mother. “Six, eight chairs, a round table, a what-not, four pictures, anything more?”

“A darling old-fashioned mahogany cradle with a hood,” said Cary admiringly. “What a shame Chrissy is too big for it! Do you think it was Daddy’s?”

“Oh, child, it far antedates him,” laughed Mrs. Dexter, “but perhaps he slept in it. Let us see, only old books in this corner. Ah, there is a leather trunk.”

Cary pounced eagerly upon it, drew it from under the shelf, and lifted the lid. There lay the rag doll, Aunt Nancy's curious bequest to her mother.

In silence Anne Dexter examined it. About two feet tall, it had a flat round head and flat body, awkward hands and feet. Its dress, low-necked and short-sleeved, looked like and probably was a frock once worn by some little child. Face and hair were painted upon the stiff cloth. The trunk also contained a Red-riding-hood cloak, two more dresses and some undergarments.

"Let's take her down to Chrissy," said Cary. "She has been shut up here so long that she will love to be played with again. I wonder what her name is."

"Lizzie may remember," replied her mother. "The doll has been in the Dexter family for something like one hundred years and I know she has a name which I have forgotten. There used to be a little arm-chair, too, Cary. Just look under the eaves and see whether it is in sight."

Cary stooped before the opening that ran far back along the edge of the sloping roof.

Yes, in plain sight and within reach was a red-painted wooden chair.

“Chrissy will love this,” she said, bringing it out. “It is big enough for her to sit in herself. Now I am going straight to the kitchen and interview Lizzie.”

Cary ran down-stairs, leaving her mother gazing thoughtfully into the old trunk. She was still in the same position when Cary returned.

“The doll’s name is Judith,” she reported, “called Judy for short. Lizzie is sure she is over one hundred and twenty-five years old. She has been covered ever so many times, whenever her face was dirty. Lizzie says Great-aunt Nancy herself covered her nicely when I was born, and painted that face. So you needn’t feel afraid of Chrissy’s getting germs because she hasn’t been played with since.”

“Oh, Cary,” said her mother suddenly, “I know it’s foolish of me, but somehow I feel as though I didn’t want to see that doll around. She would be a daily reminder of something that is better forgotten. Let’s take only the little chair. Chrissy doesn’t know about her and she has so many toys. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Why, no, Mammy, I only wanted to see her, and she certainly isn’t any beauty. If you don’t care to have her down-stairs that settles it,” said Cary. “Go to sleep again, Judith; you’ll have to stay in your trunk for the present.”

CHAPTER IX

ONE MONDAY

“WHAT is there about Monday morning that makes one feel as though a special curse rested upon it?” sighed Mrs. Dexter on the second day of the following week. Christine was as cross as that cheerful little person knew how to be, and her dressing and breakfasting had been a series of snarls punctuated by tears; Charles Dexter, though blessed with an even disposition and a sense of humor, seemed to have mislaid both when he cut himself shaving and found the furnace fire out; Lizzie was grumpy because lowering skies gave no promise of drying any clothes, and everything seemed to be wrong with Cary.

“What are you looking for?” her mother asked at length, when Cary had twice turned over each article on the big library table and was tossing papers and magazines into confused piles.

"Oh, my French exercise book," was the fretful reply. "I left it here on Saturday and now it is gone. I must have it, for our notebooks are to be marked this morning. I can't find my fountain pen either, and I *know* that was on my bureau Friday night."

"If it was there, very likely the crow took it. You said he was walking over the bureau."

"Perhaps he did take the pen, but it's a queer coincidence that the book is missing, too. Even though he is a prince in disguise, he shows considerable intelligence in choosing that. More likely that Candace Halliday took it."

Mrs. Dexter suppressed a sharp reproof. "Don't be absurd, Cary. Of course she did nothing of the sort."

"You don't understand, Mother," said Cary crossly, "that if I can't find that note-book and hand it in, Candace will get the highest mark for the month in French, when it ought by good rights to be mine. She must have taken it, for it was here on the table where she left her own books when she came home with me."

"Of course it is possible that Candace picked it up by mistake, but really you must not say you think *she* took it deliberately."

“What am I to think when it isn’t here?” Cary began, but just then Chrissy began to cry and Mr. Dexter called from the hall.

“Anne, I’ve pulled a button off this coat.”

Seizing a needle, Mrs. Dexter disappeared to render first aid to a husband impatient to get to school. Cary, muttering to herself, completed the disorder of the table by upsetting a brass holder full of pencils and pens, and rushed off without the usual kiss to her mother. Her uncereemonious exit tickled her father’s sense of fun.

“Cheer up, Anne,” he said as he followed. “We’ll both come back in a better frame of mind.”

Mrs. Dexter put the library in its usual condition of neatness, with an eye to Cary’s lost possessions, but neither came to light. “I suppose she left them both at school,” she thought. “Now if Chrissy is sick, she is going back to bed; if she is just naughty, she can stop fretting. I may not be able to straighten out the older members of my family so easily, but Christine may choose between her crib and being pleasant.”

Cary herself thought she might find the miss-

ing note-book in her desk and immediately searched for it, but in vain. As she closed the lid, she looked up to meet Candace's eyes.

Nothing was more natural than that Candace should be waiting to give her a morning greeting, but Cary's ill-humor distorted the glance into a confession of guilt. At her first opportunity, she confided her loss and her suspicions to both Amy and Janet.

"Why, how shocking!" said Amy, accepting Cary's theory without the slightest consideration. "And you really deserve the highest mark in French."

"Cary, that's ridiculous," said Janet, always just to others. "You've mislaid it. Candace wouldn't do anything like that."

"It's rather suspicious that she should be looking at me just then," Cary retorted, "and the book is neither here nor at home."

"I lose things often enough myself, so that I'd want to look more than one morning before I decided it was stolen," said Janet sensibly. "Tell Miss Dubois that you can't find it and perhaps she will hold up your mark until tomorrow when you have had another chance to hunt for it."

"I'll try," said Cary, and she did. Had she not been the daughter of the principal and had not the excuse of a mislaid book been an old one to the French instructor, the request might have been granted, but Miss Dubois was anxious to avoid any possible charge of favoritism, and she knew of cases where the excuse was made to gain time. Cary's work had to stand on her class showing and her mark for the month was far below the one gained by Candace.

"It's unjust and unkind and I'm not going to stand it," Cary sputtered. "I'll tell Candace just what I think of her."

Janet had a consoling arm about her friend. "Did you ask Candace if she saw it?" she inquired.

"Yes," sobbed Cary. "She said she hadn't, but she looked very conscious when I spoke. I believe she did take it, Janet."

"Oh, don't think that. Truly it isn't worth it. A mark doesn't affect your real knowledge of French and we all know that you pronounce and translate much better than the rest of us. It is only in putting English into French that Candace gets ahead."

"That's where my book would have shown

that I could do it. I worked so hard this month, and I know I improved. And now I don't get any credit for it."

Janet was silent. To offer any real consolation when Cary felt so sore was difficult. "Will you let me come and help hunt for that notebook this afternoon?" she asked.

"Yes," said Cary, wiping her eyes. "I'd love to have you come, but I know we shall never find it. Do I look as though I'd been crying? I hate to have Mother see me, for Chrissy and I were both as cross as bears this morning. Come as early as you can, Janet."

When Janet arrived at the Butterfly House that afternoon, calm seemed to have descended upon the family. After half an hour in bed, Chrissy arose, sweet as a day in June; Mr. Dexter was whistling softly over a pair of skis he was repairing, and Cary remained serene, even though a careful search revealed no trace of the missing book.

"Perhaps you dropped it coming from school," Janet at length decided. "If you did, you will get it again, because your name was on the cover."

"Mother thinks the crow took it," said Cary.

"I guess he did take the pen, because I know that was on my bureau, but I am sure I left the note-book in the library where he couldn't get in. Did you bring your knitting?"

"Yes," replied Janet, producing it. "More socks for Arthur. He wears them out incredibly fast, and says he should perish daily without them."

"Has he been in Texas ever since he volunteered?" Mrs. Dexter asked, as the two settled themselves on the big couch before the fireplace.

"No," said Janet, "he is there only for instruction in actual flying. The men who pass the physical tests for aviation, and Arthur says they are very severe indeed, go first to what is called a ground school, and many of them never get any farther. That is where the college men stand the best chance, for it takes a trained mind to get through such a stiff course."

"What does a 'ground school' mean?" asked Cary.

"It is called that because there is no actual flying. They learn the theory of flight and wireless telegraphy and map-making and signaling and how to use different guns and all about engines and ever so many such things.

I can't begin to tell you, but it is very difficult and many men are dropped entirely or put back into lower classes. There were seventy-five in Arthur's class when he started, but less than twenty were sent on for instruction in actual flying. We were so proud of him, for he is only twenty-two, you see. Now he is down in Texas."

"Does he like flying?" asked Cary.

"He is crazy about it," said Janet. "He says it really is not so dangerous as people suppose, because the planes are so strong and so well-built, but of course there are accidents through cadets losing their heads, or through carelessness. He wrote of one fellow who tried to make a landing and came down in a tree. The plane was smashed, but the pilot merely scratched one knee. Arthur is at the most advanced camp now, and expects to 'win his wings,' as they call it, and get his commission before Christmas."

"Wings?" repeated Cary.

"Yes, the right to wear a shield with two wings on his left breast. He hopes to be sent to France, but says he may be kept at camp as an instructor."

“Your mother wouldn’t object to that,” said Mrs. Dexter, smiling.

“No,” Janet agreed, “only she knows Arthur would hate it. I can’t myself see why all the boys are so crazy to get to the front. And when it comes to killing other people, I am sure Arthur won’t like it at all, for it has been the beauty of flying and the joy of motion and the clouds and the sunsets that he so appreciates.”

“I suppose the actual conflict will seem impersonal,” commented Mrs. Dexter, “more so in air-fighting than in other kinds. How do they get the necessary experience in gunnery?”

“Oh, at targets towed by another plane, or with a gun that is really a camera and takes a picture at the exact moment the shot would be fired, so the developed plates tell how correctly they aimed. They work extremely hard and the men who win their wings deserve them. But it isn’t all drudgery, for Arthur writes of interesting lectures and entertainments and says he can almost always get hold of a magazine or a book when he wants one. He spoke of one odd thing; when there is one accident, more are almost sure to happen the same day, and once about half the planes in camp came to grief

within a few hours. When one man gets nervous it seems contagious. That day when so many machines were disabled, the men were lined up and given what he calls a 'bawling-out.' Arthur hadn't been flying that day, but had to hear the lecture just the same. He wrote about trying to make molasses candy on the stove in his tent, and it boiled over and made a dreadful mess. Some others saw the black smoke pouring from the flap and thought the tent was on fire, and before Arthur knew what was happening, his entire company was lined up to put out his burning molasses."

"What happened then?" laughed Cary.

"He didn't say that anything did. It was an hour when the cadets were off duty and I suppose he had a right to make candy if he wished. But since he told us about it, we have tried to send him some quite regularly. He will like your helmet, Cary. He says he uses one of different weight for different days, according to the weather."

"It will be finished by to-morrow," said Cary, regarding it thoughtfully.

"Mother is sending a package Wednesday,"

Janet went on. "You can put in the helmet and I shall tell him that you made it."

"I wonder if he will like it enough to write me about it," observed Cary. "It would be such fun to get a letter from him."

"Write to thank you?" laughed Janet. "I think it likely, considering that Mother brought him up. He'll hear from her if he isn't polite enough to thank you."

As she spoke, Janet's ball of yarn rolled toward Mrs. Dexter.

"Why, Janet, what have you been doing?" she inquired as the girl reached for it. "Your hands look as though you'd been trying to tame a tiger."

"Aren't they dreadful?" agreed Janet, looking at the numerous scratches that decorated her wrists and fingers. "It was May's kitten. I think cats must be my unlucky animal, for I seem fated to get into scrapes with them. Last evening, Father and Mother went to that lecture in the Town Hall, but May wasn't feeling quite well, so I stayed with her. Her kitten got up in my lap, and I slipped my bracelet over its head, making it a little gold collar. It looked

very cunning and May was pleased, but pretty soon, the horrid little thing managed to get the bracelet into its mouth and wedged in such a way that I couldn't move it.

"I think perhaps I could have forced it back, only it was over its teeth as well and the kitten was dreadfully frightened. After clawing me desperately, it flew about the room as though in a fit. I put on gloves and tried again, but made its poor mouth bleed and that nearly finished May. The whole affair was so good for her when she wasn't feeling well to begin with! The kit tore around foaming at the mouth and May cried and I couldn't do anything with either of them.

"Finally I telephoned to Larry Woods and asked him to come over and help me. When he arrived, the kitten was laid out exhausted on the rug and May and I were in despair. We rolled the cat in a sweater and I held it while Larry tried to dislodge the bracelet. He couldn't without knocking out a tooth, and May could never stand that nor forgive us."

"What did you do?" asked the interested Cary.

"I brought the wire-cutters and Larry sawed

the bracelet apart," sighed Janet. "I hated to do it, but it seemed the only way. Well, the kitten is all right again, and I took the bracelet to the jeweler this morning. He said he could mend it so it would scarcely show, but he evidently thought it was a very curious injury. I wouldn't tell him what had happened to it, for I knew he would tell the whole town. But I can assure you," ended Janet, surveying her red-streaked hands, "that I shall never again use a bracelet for a kitten's collar."

CHAPTER X

HARVEST SUPPER

STRANGE to say, nothing more was seen of either Cary's pen or note-book. She finally agreed that the crow must have taken the first from her bureau, but stubbornly stuck to her own opinion as to the fate of the exercises.

Candace thought Cary unaccountably chilly after the Hallowe'en owl hunt, and withdrew more than ever into her shell, taking almost no part in school events outside the class-room, being unsociable even at recess, and the other girls were too busy with various affairs to take the trouble to penetrate her reserve.

Two weeks later came the harvest supper at the church, an event which Cary found most interesting. Out in the country, where one actually saw the apples picked and the corn cut, the gathering of crops took on real significance and the service of thanksgiving seemed appropriate.

Cary willingly accepted when Janet and Amy pressed her into work as a waitress.

With some advice from Mrs. Dexter and assistance from a few obliging boys, the older girls trimmed the parish house. If Kitty, Maud, Dorothy and the rest felt this autumn the absence of the young men who in previous years helped arrange the corn-stalks and pile the pumpkins, they were brave and philosophical, but the gay laughter as they worked served as cover for many a thought going to some lad in camp or already over sea. Cutler, Ned, Evan and other young boys did their best to supply the vacant places of those who were serving their country.

When the waitresses appeared, smart in dainty light dresses and little ruffled aprons, the transformed parish house called for admiration. Shocks of unhusked corn stood at the base of the beams, the lights gleamed softly through yellow shades, each table was prettily decorated with fall fruits, and on and about the raised platform with its table for the church officers, was heaped an immense quantity of vegetables and orchard produce, apples, carrots, egg-plants, cauliflowers, celery, potatoes, squashes,

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—every variety that Ridgefield farms yielded during the season. At sight of this, Cary's eyes opened.

“What is to be done with all that?” she asked.

“It goes to the hospital and the Old People's Home,” Janet replied. “Everybody gives something. Father brought that bushel of potatoes and a barrel of apples. It is the parish thank-offering for good crops, and everything is given away.”

“Come, girls,” called Mrs. Baker. “Janet, you take this side of this first table for yours, and Cary may work with you. Can you manage it between you or had there better be a third? I guess we will have three waitresses for each table. I'll send somebody else later. Amy, you and Priscilla and Margaret take this next one.”

Busy Mrs. Baker's voice died away as she crossed the room, issuing directions as she went.

“Tell me what to do, Janet,” said Cary. “I never waited at a church supper in my life.”

“It is fun,” replied Janet. “To-night we are to have a war supper, baked beans, and meat-loaf that is really hominy and peanuts,

and it's ever so good, because Mother made it. Then there is brown bread and graham and rye, every kind except white, and canned peas that were raised and canned in Ridgefield. For dessert there is every kind of pie you can imagine, with coffee and sweet cider. The boys will pour the coffee. We are to bring the platters of food for our table and pass the beans and meat-loaf and the peas. Then we clear the table and bring dessert. There isn't much to do, except to see that people have what they want. But, Cary, if you really have never attended a harvest supper before, you ought to go into the church where the people are gathering and see the whole affair. Let us both go. We will get near the head of the line and slide into place when we come out. I'll just tell Mrs. Baker, so she won't think we have deserted."

Janet and Cary slipped through the winding passage into the church, already well-filled with people, who, having laid aside their wraps, awaited the summons to supper. Almost before Cary discovered her parents in the throng, Ned Babcock sounded a single note on his flute, and the people began to form, two and two, in a long line. Led by the flute-player and six

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men and boys from the choir, they moved in procession toward the parish house, singing as they went:

“‘Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin:
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied,
Come, ye grateful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.’”

Cary heard Janet's sweet notes join the hymn of thanksgiving, heard voice after voice come in to swell the volume of sound till it rose to echo among the arches. Still singing and in decorous procession, they entered the parish house, continuing the music until each table was surrounded by standing people, whose heads were reverently bowed while Mr. Richards gave thanks for the year's crops and asked a blessing on the harvest supper. Their sincere earnestness and the plain simplicity of it all, touched Cary rather deeply, for she had never known anything quite like this little church, a church that somehow seemed so much a part of the real life of the community. It was all so intimate and so genuine.

Cary had scant time for meditating, for the

ladies in the serving-room announced the food ready to take in, and she flew to attend to her duties. Not until every one in her section was served and she drew back for a general survey to see whether a glass needed refilling, did she realize that Mrs. Baker had sent Candace for the third waitress at their table, and that Candace was not getting on very well. Indeed, Janet had gone to the rescue and was gently advising Candace to pass her platter at the left of each person, not the right, a hint which Candace received with a deep blush. She looked uncomfortable and out of place, thought Cary, but she forgot Candace in trying to see where her parents were seated. Presently she discovered them at the head table, with Mr. and Mrs. Richards, the Chapins and other prominent people. Kitty Metcalf was waiting on them. Beside her father sat a tiny old woman, dressed in shabby black, with white hair and a worn, lined face, to whom Mr. Dexter was paying marked attention.

“Janet,” whispered Cary, catching her friend’s arm, “who is that little old lady sitting by Daddy?”

“Granny Halliday,” Janet replied after a

glance in the direction indicated. "Candace's grandmother, you know. She hardly ever gets down the mountain to church. The Parks must have brought her. How nice of Mr. Richards to have her sit at that table! Goodness me! are they going to trust Van with a pitcher of coffee? I'm glad I'm not sitting at the table where he's to pour."

Van was not the person who came to grief, but Cary herself. Turning abruptly from the serving-table, she ran into Candace and spilled almost a whole dish of peas. Fortunately they landed on the floor, not in any one's lap, but Cary's apron and white dress were badly splashed.

"Never mind," said Kitty consolingly. "Here's a fresh apron, Cary. I brought it in case anybody had an accident."

Her cheeks burning, Cary tied on the dainty bit of muslin, deliberately ignoring the distressed Candace, who indeed said no word of apology for her share of the accident.

"You fared better than somebody at my table," said Maud to Cary in passing. "Mrs. Baxter thought the table extended to the very edge of the stiff paper covering it, when it

was only sticking out, so she pulled her plate forward and the whole thing tipped into her lap on top of her feather ruff. That ruff is a sight!"

Maud went on laughing and Cary took her refilled dish, giving Candace a wide berth on her way to the table. She met with no further mishap either in clearing away dishes or serving dessert.

"Have some pie, Cary?" Van asked, meeting her a little later, a huge wedge in each hand. "I'm staying behind this screen because the forks have run short."

"You could have a fork if you wanted it, Van Richards," said Kitty, smiling at him.

"I don't want it," admitted Van, sampling first one wedge and then the other. "Pie always tastes much better eaten this way. I've been trying to catch my mother's eye, but she won't look at me. I wonder if she is afraid of what she may see."

"I imagine so," laughed Cary. "My table is all cleared, Mrs. Baker. What next?"

"Nothing. Help yourself to anything you want to eat," said the busy head of the serving committee.

Cary sampled the mock-meat loaf, which she found much to her taste, drank the coffee she was not permitted to have at home, and selected a piece of lemon-pie, prudently providing herself with both fork and plate. Then she joined Van, who had finished his pie and was gazing over the top of the screen, in much the attitude of a Raphael cherub.

“Do you know everybody here?” she inquired.

Van looked around the two big rooms. “Yes,” he said thoughtfully. “You see that fat old woman over there? She is the best cook in Ridgefield. It was her mince-pie I was eating just now. We used to have chicken-pie suppers sometimes, and her pie was always solid meat, no bones at all. If you could eat another piece, Cary,—mince-pie, I mean,—I can get it for you, because through a lucky accident I happen to know where the rest of it is. I can recommend it without reservation.”

“I’m not very fond of mince-pie, Van,” laughed Cary. “I won’t deprive you of it. Where have you hidden it?”

“What an unjust thought!” sighed Van. “Amy might have had it but I didn’t think it

of you, Cary. Ah, the ladies are getting out their knitting and we shall hear the parish reports."

"Why didn't you bring your knitting?" asked Cary mischievously.

"I am knitting," said her companion unexpectedly, "a wrister, but it is for a one-armed man."

"What is going on now?" asked Cary in a whisper, her attention suddenly distracted, for everybody beyond the partition dividing the parish house proper from the serving-room had suddenly risen, while Mr. Richards read a brief list of names.

"Sh!" said Van softly, as every head was bowed, and for half a minute silence reigned.

"It is a tribute to the people who have died since the last harvest supper," he explained, when the rustle of reseating began. "Now Father is going to read the honor roll of men in service."

Both Cary and Van were silent as the twenty-four names were pronounced. At each, the boy's parents, if present, rose, until over forty people were standing, from Dr. and Mrs. Chapin to old Mr. and Mrs. Hicks, whose tiny cabin on

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Cloud boasted a service flag. Then everybody again rose, this time with heads erect, and began to sing: "Bless Thou our native land!"

Cary turned to Van to surprise a look of genuine emotion on his face, but before she could speak, Van muttered something and disappeared, apparently leaving the parish house. Cary hardly noticed his going, so interesting and impressive did she find the scene before her. Her sympathies were keenly touched and she was yet absorbed in the parish proceedings when some one came to her side.

"Cary," said a voice, "I'm sorry about those peas."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Candace," said Cary, more pleasantly than would have been possible fifteen minutes previously. "I bumped into you just as much as you into me. My dress will wash and Kitty lent me a fresh apron."

"That isn't all," said Candace, her tone expressing real misery. "I don't know what you will think of me, Cary, but,—here's that note-book you lost."

"*What!*" exclaimed Cary, turning upon her. "My note-book! And you had it all the time?"

"I didn't know it," said Candace wretchedly.

"I found it only to-night when Granny wanted her black shawl to wear. I had it Hallowe'en for the witch's dress and it hasn't been used since. The book fell out of it. I suppose that I picked it up when I gathered my things that next morning. I feel dreadfully about it, Cary."

"Indeed, you ought to," said Cary cruelly. "You made me lose my mark for October. It's pretty hard not to believe that you didn't do it on purpose."

Candace turned pale. "You have no right to think that," she said indignantly.

"You told me that you didn't see that book," Cary went on. "You let me be marked down because I couldn't find it, and you received the highest mark yourself. Now you bring it back and expect me to believe that it was an accident."

"If I took it purposely, what would be the use of giving it to you now and telling you about it?" demanded Candace with justifiable indignation. "I should think you would see that if I took it deliberately, I wouldn't be very likely *ever* to return it."

Cary did see that and was silenced.

“To-morrow morning I shall go to Miss Du-bois and tell her about it,” Candace continued, pursuing her advantage. “She is just in marking if she is severe, and she can’t help giving you credit for your October work when she understands how it happened.”

“Well,” said Cary, “if you do that— Oh, I suppose it is all right, Candace,—yes, of course, it is,—but I don’t want to talk about it and I wish it hadn’t happened.”

Candace turned away, her throat feeling very lumpy. To confess to Cary had been anything but easy, and Cary’s last words left her feeling more hurt and mortified than ever.

CHAPTER XI

KITTY'S WEDDING

A FEW days later, Cary, coming home from school, gave an exclamation as she found on the hall table a letter directed to her, and post-marked from a town in Texas. Her mother smiled, for she had expected that cry of pleasure.

"It must be from Janet's brother!" Cary called excitedly. "Mammy, what fun!"

"Bring it out to lunch," said her mother from the dining-room. "We have already begun."

Cary could not wait to eat before opening this important missive. With her mother's permission she tore it open at once.

"What a nice, long one!" she began. "Oh, let me read it to you now. I don't care if things *are* getting cold. It's very important, for I never had a letter from a soldier before. Just listen.

"MY DEAR MISS CARY:" "how nice of him not to be stiff and call me Miss Dexter!" she interpolated. "I was tremendously pleased

with the helmet you made for me which came yesterday in the package from home. It is a splendid fit and I really like it better than either of the two I had, because the opening is big enough for my whole face and I never could stand anything over my mouth. I thank you a thousand times.

"I am through my work now and just hanging around waiting for my commission. I have qualified as a Reserve Military Aviator, in other words, have won my wings. Having finished everything, I haven't had much chance to fly, lately, for of course the planes are wanted for cadets still at work, but the other day I received permission to take a 'bus,' and went off for a joy ride.

"I had a fine time soaring around and trying stunts, swooping down on a big interurban car and making the motorman think I was going to break my neck, but I was going so much faster than he that I could stop to give him but one thrill. After a while, something went wrong with my engine, so I shut off power and volplaned down on the prairie.

"The place I landed was a level bit in rather rolling country, the great swells of the prairie, with nothing living in sight except the flocks of birds that flew up before the airplane. The engine was very balky and I was intent on it, when I looked around and caught a thrill myself. Coming behind me, with noses up and intense interest written on their faces was a mob of Texas cattle, cows and steers.

"I had landed into the wind and I suppose they either saw me come down or perhaps scented me, at any rate, there they were, com-

ing with a purposeful sort of manner that I didn't fancy. Cattle are very curious, you know, and probably they wanted to see what was going on.

"Well, I worked at my engine like mad, and fortunately the noise of the motor would drive them to a little distance, but just as soon as I shut it off, back they would come, each time a little nearer. And it looked as though they were feeling annoyed as well as curious. I wasn't sure how the wings of my bus would stand a charge if they chose to make one, so it was up to me to get that engine going. But the old thing kept missing fire, and the cattle began to circle about me, still at a good distance. Pretty soon two or three began to paw the ground and rumble in their throats and act generally as though the fight was on.

"I decided I'd better find a healthier place to repair that machinery and I was quite sure the engine would hold for me to get up a height sufficient so that I could volplane down again into a less populous bit of prairie a few miles on. So I hustled into my safety-belt and prepared to leave.

"An airplane when it rises runs for some distance on its landing wheels before it leaves the ground. Imagine my feelings when I found a regular old patriarch of a Texan steer planted right in my path! If I hit him I wasn't sure which would be butted off the track, but in the second I had to think, I took the chance of his turning tail, and he did. I cleared his back by about a foot, and when I looked down, he was still headed for the Gulf of Mexico. The rest were galloping madly in every direction.

"After all, I wasn't obliged to land again, for my engine experienced a change of heart and gave no further trouble. I am still wondering when that steer stopped running.

"As soon as I am commissioned I am going to make a big effort to get a furlough and come home for Christmas. If I am stuck as an instructor,—kept to teach others,—I may not get my pass, but if I am posted for active service, meaning probably France, I shall surely be permitted to come home first. And then I shall have the pleasure of meeting my sister's friend.

"Cordially yours,

"ARTHUR E. CHAPIN.

"Gracious, wasn't that exciting!" gasped Cary, concluding the letter. "Wouldn't he have been in a fix if he hadn't managed to start the engine?"

"A decidedly dangerous one," said her father. "The cattle of the prairies are used only to men on horseback and while they are easily managed as a rule, they will usually turn at once upon a cowboy who is thrown from his horse. With his airplane damaged he was really in rather a serious situation."

"But what a nice, friendly letter," said Mrs. Dexter. "Now truly, wasn't that better than risking a 'war son' you didn't know anything about?"

"Yes, Mammy," Cary agreed happily. "Wasn't it kind of him to write more than just to thank me? I hope he will get his pass. The Chapins are so anxious to see him."

"Everybody speaks of Arthur as being a remarkably fine fellow," said her father. "Come, Cary, eat your luncheon."

"Both the Doctor and Mrs. Chapin felt dreadfully to have him go, but Janet says that they would not say anything to prevent him and are proud that he chose to volunteer so quickly."

"As so many other parents have felt," said her mother softly. "With most it is a willing sacrifice, for they cannot do less than the boys themselves. That is a very nice letter, Cary, and it is evident that a nice boy wrote it. We shall all be interested to see him when he comes. There's the telephone."

"It is for you, Cary," said Lizzie, appearing in the dining-room. Though she persisted in addressing Mrs. Dexter as Miss Anne, she called her husband Charlie, and nothing could induce her to honor the daughter of the house with any prefix whatever.

"It doesn't look as though Cary would get her luncheon eaten," sighed Mrs. Dexter after some

moments, listening to the series of exclamations that formed Cary's share of the dialogue. "Something exciting must have happened."

Presently Cary came flying back, her eyes wide with astonishment. "Mammy," she exclaimed dramatically, "look at the clock! It's twenty minutes to two. At four, Kitty Metcalf is to be married to Anson Brooks and all the girls must hustle to get the church trimmed somehow!"

"Married!" repeated Mrs. Dexter, evincing surprise sufficient to satisfy her daughter.

"Yes," declared Cary, eating her cold luncheon in hasty mouthfuls. "Janet says the telegram from Anson came about noon saying he was ordered on active service, and had five days' leave and would Kitty marry him immediately. His train gets in at three and the ceremony is set for four. They will leave town at once and she will stay with him till he goes. He's a naval ensign, you know, and they think he must have been assigned to a boat escorting transports. Kitty hasn't her wedding dress made, but she has a pretty white one she's never worn, and she wants to be married in church. Of course she doesn't expect it to be decorated, doesn't

dream of it, but Maud and Dorothy want to surprise her and so they are asking everybody to come and help. The boys are already getting pine boughs and we are to beg chrysanthemums from everybody who has any. I may pick all that are left in our garden, mayn't I? Mrs. Price has some white potted ones in her little hot-house and she is going to lend them. Janet says it will have to be very simple, but it will please Kitty so much to have us do it. And of course with a wedding at four hours' notice, lots of relatives can't get here, so Kitty wants all her friends and all the church people who care to see her married, to come. Isn't it exciting? No, I couldn't eat anything more; I'll go pick the chrysanthemums."

Cary's last words sounded from the hall where she was getting into cap and coat, for the November day was chilly. The next moment she was seen flying through the frost-stricken garden to a sheltered spot where some red button-chrysanthemums still held up courageous heads.

"Married on four hours' notice and with only five days before her husband must leave her!" said Mrs. Dexter in a tone of sympathy.

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“Poor Kitty! No,—happy, patriotic Kitty! I wonder if I can help them. Of course, with no florist in town, it is quite a problem.”

But in this case, as in others, the old proverb about many hands making light work held true. For the next hour the pretty little stone church was the scene of excited labor and, for a time, great confusion. The expressman bringing Mrs. Price's cherished pots of great white blossoms, blanketed his horse and stayed to help. The girls ran about, getting in one another's way, mixing decorations and hurrying without need. But Maud and Dorothy, who loved Kitty dearly, kept their heads and straightened the mistakes of their excited young assistants. By quarter past three, the church was fragrant with pine boughs prettily arranged, the pews of the center aisle gay with white-tied flowers, the potted plants on the chancel steps, and the altar itself beautiful with the choicest blossoms selected from the many gardens that gladly yielded anything they had for Kitty's wedding. When the first guest entered, no one could have guessed that all had been done at such short notice. Kitty would have the surprise of her

life, were her thoughts not too much occupied to notice the loving tribute of her friends.

And so many and so varied were the people that filled the church! Cary, sitting with Janet, watched them curiously. Mrs. Metcalf was known for her neighborliness and kindness to all, and not a few poorly-clad women came from the lower village, knowing Miss Kitty through her visits to their less fortunate homes. The laundress came, the clerk from the grocery came, even the postmaster, who had delivered many letters directed in one hand-writing, dropped in to attend this, the first war-wedding in Ridgefield.

The organist chanced to be out of town, but Maud Hilton was delighted at the opportunity to play for Kitty, and was softly filling the church with music as people came and came. Promptly at four, the door into the vestry opened and Mr. Richards came out, accompanied by a tall bronzed young man in blue naval uniform, with a fine, pleasant face, close-cut hair, and bearing on his collar the anchors, on sleeve and shoulder the star and bar of his rank.

Maud's fingers broke into the wedding march

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from Lohengrin just as Mr. Richards stopped on the first step of the chancel, and Anson, at his left, turned and stood at the top of the center aisle. He was very pale as he faced the church full of people, many of whom knew him well. Yet his eyes never wavered from Kitty's face, his Kitty, coming to meet him on her father's arm, her eyes only for Anson. As she reached the head of the aisle, Anson stepped forward and offered his arm. Kitty dropped that of her father.

"Dearly beloved brethren," came Mr. Richards' familiar voice, "we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

Cary craned her neck. Kitty wore a simple white gown, no gloves and her mother's wedding-veil. She carried the lilies Anson's thoughtfulness provided. Both repeated the first responses audibly; Mr. Metcalf placed Kitty's hand in Anson's and stepped back beside his wife in the front pew. Now they went up to the altar to take their vows. More than a few eyes filled with sudden sympathy for Kitty, whose clear voice broke when she reached

one phrase,—poor Kitty, who could not say “till death do us part.” Yet no one but Anson saw the steadying hand Mr. Richards laid upon her wrist, and Anson himself was almost as agitated.

Well, it was over, that first war-wedding. Kitty smiled bravely right and left as she came down the aisle, but Anson's young face was set and determined, as of one who sees a grim duty before him from which he will not flinch. No one left the church until Mr. and Mrs. Metcalf and Anson's parents followed and all had driven away. No one even spoke to them, lest one moment of those precious five days be usurped, every second of which should be consecrated to each other.

“It was sweet, wasn't it, Mammy?” said Cary, coming home utterly tired out with excitement and exertion. “Kitty did love our doing the church. Mrs. Metcalf called Maud and Dorothy up to tell them so and asked them to thank us all. Wasn't Anson swell in his blue uniform and decorations? But, Mammy, I think a wedding is kind of unsatisfactory. We flew around so hard getting that church fixed and then everything was over in ten minutes. And I suppose

if there had been more time to get ready, everybody would have worked harder and longer, but in the end it would have been over just as quick."

"Indeed it was a charming wedding," her mother agreed. "Kitty's old-fashioned veil was quite in keeping with her short dress. I never saw but one long wedding-veil that I thought pretty. Most of them look like a heavy freight train pulling up the aisle. But I believe you would prefer a wedding in the Greek church. There the church ceremony lasts two or three hours, and besides that there is a civil marriage before a magistrate."

"Two hours seems better worth all the work," observed Cary, "but it must be pretty hard on the bride. Kitty looked as though ten minutes was all she could stand. I guess, Mammy, it's better as it is."

CHAPTER XII

THE PRIZE-SPEAKING

A WEEK later the little war-bride came quietly back to Ridgefield alone, leaving her young husband in New York, bound for an "unknown destination."

Kitty's friends welcomed her gladly, would have permitted her to pose as a martyr, were such her wish, but nothing was further from Kitty's thoughts. Instead, she returned to her accustomed home and social duties in her own cheerful way, with only a graver, sweeter, more mature expression on her face to mark the change from Kitty Metcalf to Katherine Brooks.

For the younger girls the excitement of the wedding was soon eclipsed by other events of importance; for Janet by news that Arthur, having won his commission, had every hope of obtaining the coveted pass and coming home for Christmas; for Cary by the immediate approach of the Hatch prize-speaking.

During the days when the High School was an endowed academy, a trustee instituted this competition, leaving to the school a sum of money yielding two annual prizes of ten dollars each, to be awarded during the term to the boy and girl making the best declamation. The entire school was required to compete. From each of the four classes one boy and one girl were chosen by a critical committee of teachers, and the eight finally recited before impartial judges, usually from out of town, and in the presence of a large audience upon the evening appointed.

To win the Hatch prize was a coveted honor, even to be one of the chosen eight a position of envy, and to not a few the acquirement of ten dollars was much. Naturally Candace was one of these last, and she threw all her energies into the preliminary speaking.

Cary cared chiefly for the honor, though even she had uses for an extra ten dollars, but she was also conscious of a desire which she knew to be unworthy, to defeat Candace. After due thought and consideration she chose for the preliminaries, Alfred Noyes' "Song of Sherwood," a poem which she recited extremely well and expressively, having heard the poet himself

read it. All the Saturday after deciding upon it, she went around the house declaiming fragments:

“Love is in the greenwood, dawn is in the skies,
And Marian is waiting with a glory in her eyes.
Hark! The dazzled laverock climbs the golden steep!
Marian is waiting; is Robin Hood asleep?”

On Monday at recess, she reported her choice, as required, to Miss Hathaway.

“Cary, that has already been taken. I’m sorry, but this morning before school, Candace Halliday told me that the ‘Song of Sherwood’ was her selection.”

“Bother!” Cary exclaimed. “How trying! Isn’t that horrid! I could just as well have come to you myself before school. Does that mean I can’t take it?”

“I’m afraid so,” replied the teacher, “unless Candace has something else she cares to recite. You might speak to her about it.”

“No, I don’t want to do that,” said Cary quickly and not very pleasantly. She went to her next recitation, which happened to be algebra with her father, in so troubled a mood that she could not give her attention to the lesson and soon made a mortifying failure. Was it

accident, when Cary rather pettishly declared her inability to solve her problem, that led Mr. Dexter to call next upon Candace, who explained the theorem correctly and promptly? Accident or design, it proved the last straw to Cary, whose eyes filled with tears. She tried to conceal them but felt certain that, later on, she should hear something from Daddy about that lesson.

Her expectations proved correct. After luncheon, he called her into the study to ask rather gravely what had been the trouble in class. Cary had no choice but to tell the whole story.

"It was my poem," she ended, "and I think it is a shame, when I chose it three days ago, and I might just as easily have spoken to Miss Hathaway the minute I reached school. I was there early enough."

"I am sorry for your disappointment," said her father, "but really, Cary, I think it is easier for you to find another than for Candace. If you still wish one of Noyes', how about the legend of Nelson? 'With the patch on his eye and a pinned-up sleeve, and a soul like a North sea storm.' That is every bit as stirring as

the 'Song of Sherwood' and in these days more appropriate. You know that in the battle off Jutland, the English sailors swore that Nelson was with them in the thick of the fight, that he was seen on more than one ship. The old boy promised to come, you know.

"'If England needs me, dead,
Or living, I'll rise that day!
I'll rise from the darkness under the sea
Ten thousand miles away.'"

Cary listened critically while her father read her the whole legend of the "Admiral's Ghost."

"I think I will take it," she said as he finished. "Only I can never do it like you. Really, I don't know but it gives a chance for more varied expression than Sherwood. That is just beautiful music."

"Don't be disappointed if Candace is chosen after all," said Mr. Dexter as Cary took the book and stood looking into it. "She speaks extremely well."

After Cary left the study, Mr. Dexter, as was customary in any perplexity, sought his wife. "Anne," said he in a puzzled tone, "isn't there a way, without hurting Cary's feelings, to get her a little off this idea of competing for the

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Hatch prize? Cary speaks clearly and with expression, but she hasn't the power, either in voice or personality, of Candace Halliday. She or Janet is rather sure to be chosen from Cary's class. I am sorry Cary is so keen on it, especially since she and Candace unluckily chose the same poem."

"I am afraid she will be disappointed," said Mrs. Dexter after a moment. "I wish she could see for herself that Candace needs the money and be willing that she should win. Cary has never quite got over that affair of the French exercise-book. I don't myself understand why, for Candace was much distressed, and explained so fully to Miss Dubois, that she gave Cary full marks for October. Still, they were below Candace's and it seems to rankle, though a sense of justice ought to show her that it was not Candace's fault. But I'll do what I can, Charles."

After some thought, Mrs. Dexter gently remarked to Cary that it would be wiser not to care too much about the preliminary competition, lest she be disappointed, but she felt that it did no good. On the fateful day she was not surprised when Cary came home with face flushed and eyes glittering.

"Candace is chosen," she announced abruptly, "and Larry for the boys. Now, Mammy, please don't say *anything*, because I am sure, and always shall be, that if I could have kept Sherwood, my dear Sherwood, I might have stood a better chance. I just don't want to talk about it."

"How did Janet do?" Mrs. Dexter asked.

"Not as well as usual," Cary replied, tossing her books upon the table. "She was upset because May walked in her sleep and knocked a plant-stand down the front stairs in the middle of the night and scared herself and everybody else. May is dear," Cary went on with a determined change of subject. "Have you ever seen her knit? She can do it without looking on and Janet says whenever they have callers, May rushes for her knitting and sits with eyes fixed on the ceiling. Little sisters are rather nice, aren't they, Chrissy?" she ended, giving Christine a hug that made her squeal.

Mrs. Dexter said nothing more and the prize-speaking was not again mentioned in the Butterfly House until the evening for the final contest, the last day before school closed for the Christmas holidays.

“Cary,” she said to her daughter, “you will come with Daddy and me, won’t you?”

“Are you going?” Cary inquired, looking up from a bag she was making for Janet.

“Oh, yes, it is expected of me. Don’t you believe it is expected of you also?”

Cary thought for a moment. Her pride was considerable and she did not wish her school-mates to criticize.

“Yes, I’ll come,” she said. “Van is going to speak something from Julius Cæsar and Amy says he does it very well. I think I’d like to hear him.”

“Then run up and put on your blue silk dress,” said her mother, greatly relieved at this ready acquiescence. “You can slip into that quickly and not keep us waiting.”

Having risen to the occasion, Cary’s conduct left nothing to be desired. She met friends and acquaintances smilingly, responded cordially to all who, greeting Mrs. Dexter, spoke also to her; she listened with a very good counterfeit of interest and approval to the eight declamations upon widely differing subjects, acted as though she enjoyed the music while the judges were out making their decision, appeared excited when,

with the opening door of the council room, the music ended abruptly in the middle of a bar, for the orchestra of the Ridgefield High School could not stop to finish any selection when the announcement of the Hatch prize winners impended. The chairman of the school committee received the written verdict of the judges, and standing on the platform, took so long to adjust his glasses and read it, that the young people fairly squirmed with impatience.

“The judges award the prizes to ‘A Song of Sherwood,’ spoken by Miss Candace Halliday, and to Mark Antony’s oration, delivered by Evan Richards,” he said after what seemed interminable eulogies on all eight speakers.

Tremendous applause filled the hall. Mrs. Dexter did not dare look at her daughter till she discovered that Cary was applauding most decorously, though it might have been wholly for Van, who had spoken with real talent and great force. Watching her opportunity, Cary congratulated him heartily and then turned promptly to Candace, whose face was flushed with excitement and delight.

“I’m ever so glad you won,” her pleased mother overheard her saying. “You were

simply splendid and certainly deserved the prize."

"Cary, you are a darling," said Mrs. Dexter when they were at home again. "I was so glad that you spoke to Candace. She would have felt hurt if you hadn't."

"Mammy," said Cary, half in fun, half in earnest, "being your very own daughter, I can't be wholly horrid. Sometimes I think you forget that I am your child. And now for the holidays! To-morrow is Saturday, and even though Christmas comes Monday, Janet and I are going to take an hour in the afternoon to skate. The ice is clear on the lake and Cutler says it is perfectly safe."

"You must plan to be out a part of every day this vacation," agreed her mother, and on the following afternoon, she took pains to tear Cary from some fascinating Christmas work and send her over to get Janet. Having watched her down the path, gay in her pretty sport coat and cap, skates clicking to every happy skip, she turned to some work that was being hidden from Cary's eyes. She was still busy when her husband came and offered to read aloud while the light lasted. With its fading, he stretched laz-

ily on the couch, enjoying to the full the first day of his well-earned vacation.

They were still talking in the firelit dusk when Cary came running up the walk and burst tumultuously into the room.

“Mammy, the most exciting thing has happened!” she exclaimed. “You can never imagine!”

“Can’t I?” drawled her father. “My imagination will stretch from here to kingdom come.”

“You can’t guess this,” Cary went on. “You know, Mammy, Arthur Chapin was expected for Christmas, and of course they were perfectly delighted, because he may go very soon to France. He wrote that he could have ten days’ leave and Mrs. Chapin has been planning for weeks, and cooking all the things Arthur likes. Well, when I went over just now for Janet, she said they received a telegram this morning that his pass was revoked and he could not come.

“You can use your imagination now, Daddy. Think how the Chapins felt. Janet said her mother broke down and cried, and they just *hated* the cakes and pies they had made. And

the Doctor felt dreadfully. But after the first, Mrs. Chapin said they must all brace up, because it would make Arthur sorry to know they couldn't stand what he had to. So everybody tried to be cheerful and Janet went skating with the rest of us and May was sliding. When we came from the lake it was just sunset and the evening train was coming up the valley, looking so pretty with its lighted windows against the snow. We watched it into the station and then I went home with Janet, to see her helmet she is knitting on four needles. We were all in the sitting-room when the outside door opened, but we supposed it was the Doctor. In just a minute the sitting-room door opened softly. I was right opposite so I looked up before the others and there stood a tall young man in khaki. It was only a second before May saw him and she gave one scream. I knew it must be Arthur for he has smiling eyes and wavy hair like Janet's. Mrs. Chapin hugged him and cried on his shoulder and Janet seized his other arm and May must have choked him because she got both arms round his neck and hung down his back, kicking her heels. Now, *isn't* that exciting, Mammy?"

“Oh, I’m so glad for Mrs. Chapin!” exclaimed her mother. “How much Christmas will mean to her with her boy at home!”

“I thought I’d better leave,” Cary went on, “because of course they had so much to say to one another, so I began to hustle into my wraps, thinking I could sneak out while they were laughing and crying and talking all at once. But I couldn’t right away, because Janet stopped me and introduced me, and Arthur thanked me again for knitting him that helmet. Oh, he looked so nice, Mammy! I’m so glad you didn’t let me make a helmet for anybody else. He is tall and slim and his uniform fits like a glove, and he has silver bars on his shoulders and a shield with two wings and a gold U. S. on his left breast and cunning crossed signal flags on his collar. He’s very good-looking and I don’t blame Janet for being crazy about him.

“Well, I tried again to get away but before I could manage it, the Doctor came. He was walking slowly and as though he was tired and kind of discouraged. As he opened the door, Arthur skipped behind it and the rest hurried to act as though nothing had happened. They

couldn't very well because there was a sort of feeling in the air and Janet was knitting upside down and May giggling in a perfectly crazy way, and Mrs. Chapin's eyes were so happy. The Doctor saw right off that something was unusual and he stopped to look about. Arthur slid an arm round his neck from behind and kissed him. Dr. Chapin didn't speak, he didn't say one word, only sat right down in the big leather chair and pulled Arthur into his lap. Then Janet and her mother piled on either arm of the chair and May climbed on top of Arthur, and I scuttled out through the dining-room. I guess it is lucky the stoutest chair in the room happened to be nearest Dr. Chapin!" concluded Cary.

"Oh, how lovely for them all!" said Mrs. Dexter, her eyes filling with sympathetic tears. "What a beautiful Christmas they will have together! I wish that might be possible for every mother who has given her boy to his country."

"He got permission at the very last moment," Cary went on, "but didn't telegraph because he was afraid the trains would be late or something would happen so he couldn't get here. I'm crazy for you to see him, Mammy;

he is perfectly fascinating in his uniform. We'll watch for him in church to-morrow."

Next morning, even had Arthur not been escorting a mother whose face shone with love and happy pride, Mrs. Dexter would have known when he appeared, because of the sudden little rustle that passed over the assembled congregation. From all parts of the church came welcoming glances and smiles, for almost everybody there knew and loved Arthur. Slim and straight he stood in his well-fitting uniform with the silver bars and the "wings" he had worked so hard to earn, but his bearing was boyishly modest. Indeed, his eyes were only for his mother and the hymnal he shared with her, but once he looked from her face straight to the service flag hanging from the chancel arch, a flag where one star shone for him.

CHAPTER XIII

OFF ON SNOW-SHOES

THOUGH feeling herself truly a Ridgefield girl, Cary rather expected to miss former conditions at Christmas, but found herself pleasantly mistaken. The Butterfly House with its sunny rooms and open fires seemed like a story-book home, and she found herself enjoying to the utmost, charming little local customs. On Christmas eve it was delightful to be with one of the groups of young people that strayed around the town singing Christmas carols and hymns, her group composed of Janet and Arthur, Amy, Cutler, and two or three of the older girls. Promptly at nine, the music ended, for none of the parents concerned believed in permitting their children to wander about even so quiet a place as Ridgefield into the small hours of the morning.

After the carols, Mrs. Dexter invited all Cary's group to share hot chocolate and cookies

before the open fire, and Arthur was persuaded to talk of his work and give them a vivid picture of life in an aviation camp.

Then even a war Christmas could not be depressing with such a bit of sunshine in the house as little Christine, perfectly delighted with the smallest surprise or the tiniest gift. Directly after the holiday, Cary and her father went to the city for a ten days' visit among their many friends, a visit crowded full of good times. When Cary again came back to Ridgefield, Arthur's leave was over and the Chapins were facing the task of missing him daily and being brave.

Naturally during his stay and Cary's absence, Amy had seen less of her friends and was glad indeed when the usual condition of things was restored.

When Ridgefield visited the main part of the village, it had a lovable way of "stepping over street." The expression at first amused Cary, then she grew to like it and finally ended by adopting it. One morning in early January, toward the end of vacation, she announced her intention of going over street to buy some yarn and seeing Janet on the way.

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“Buy a yeast-cake also,” said her mother, who was writing letters. “I suppose you will be back for luncheon?”

“Oh, yes,” said Cary, but she surprised the family by returning within half an hour.

“Here’s Lizzie’s yeast-cake, but I didn’t stop for the yarn. I met Amy and she wants us all to go snow-shoeing. Cutler says the snow is fairly good. He and Van are going and Janet and May, too, because May has a new pair of shoes she is crazy to try.”

“Aren’t you going to wait until after luncheon?” asked her mother.

“Listen, Mammy, you haven’t heard all the plan. We are to take sandwiches and perhaps build a fire, and picnic somewhere on the Thorn mountain road.”

“Is it all right for her to go, Charles?” asked Mrs. Dexter of her husband, busy with his typewriter over some work for the Public Safety Committee.

“Yes, if Cutler is of the party. I would trust him anywhere.”

“Won’t you come too, Daddy?” asked Cary, busy pulling on heavy woolen stockings and

changing her boots for high moccasins. "We'd love to have you."

"I would if it wasn't for this report, but I must get it into shape for a meeting at four this afternoon. Good luck! The day isn't cold and you ought to have fine sport."

Cary was ready when the party paused at the gate of the Butterfly House, all with warm outgoing clothes, moccasins and snow-shoes, even little May, who was very skillful and kept up with the rest without special effort. For a time they straggled on more or less in single file, but after leaving the town, Cary came abreast of Janet.

"I've something to tell you," she began, "something very sweet."

"What is it?" asked Janet, turning with the little look of patience that had lingered about her face ever since Arthur went back to his duty, —a duty that took him to "an unknown place."

"Last night," said Cary, coming as close as snow-shoes permitted, "Father and Mother went out to dinner and I put Chrissy to bed. She's noticed the service flags on the different houses and asked why we didn't have one, so

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Mammy explained that everywhere there was a flag and a star, it meant somebody's son had gone to war, and we didn't have any boy to go.

"It was just sunset when I took Chrissy upstairs, a dim dusky red kind of sunset, and very bright above the glow the evening star was shining. Chrissy looked at the clouds and the star and said she guessed God had put out His service flag."

"The darling!" exclaimed Janet. "How sweet of her!"

"Wasn't it?" Cary agreed. "Mother knew you'd like it."

"It is a lovely thought," said Janet. "And it does seem, Cary, as though Christ really must be with the boys at the front. Arthur isn't the kind who ever says much about things like that, and when he was home just now, he acted like a perfect kid, turned a somersault in the living-room, and chased me around the table, and hung about the kitchen to scrape the cake dish, but the letter that came yesterday, the one that means he is going to France, was so dear and loving. He told Mother not to worry about him, for he was with a fine bunch of fellows and that everywhere he went he carried with him

the memory of his home, and then he said: 'You know just that is enough to keep a fellow out of any temptation, but somehow God seems very real and close to us now, and death, if it comes, isn't anything that matters.'

"When I write, I'll tell Arthur about Chris-sy's service flag," she added after a moment, "and then, when he sees the evening star, he can know we are thinking that, too. May said a cunning thing the other day. She was reading the 'Cave Twins' and in one place, the cave-mother tells Fire-top, the boy twin, to 'shut up.' May read it and then said in the most shocked tone: 'Such language! And from a mother!' "

"I can't imagine either my mother or yours saying it to any of us," laughed Cary, "but I suppose some mothers might. I think Mrs. Richards must *feel* like saying it to Van. I was there the other day when Van rushed into the house, shouting for 'Ma!' Mrs. Richards said pleasantly, 'Evan, you know I don't like you to call me that.' So then, just to tease, Van said 'Ma—Ma,' with a long pause between the syllables, and then he hugged her and told her she was 'some old girl!' "

“Isn’t he funny!” laughed Janet. “Do you know he gave half his prize money to the Red Cross? Nobody suggested it; he chose to do it of his own accord, but he insisted on joining his dog and Amy’s cat as members! I guess the committee must have thought he was crazy, only Mr. Gill has charge of it and he of course, knows Van.”

Half-way up the Thorn mountain road, Amy stopped. “I think I won’t go any farther,” she said. “I can’t for the life of me, keep this strap tight enough and I’m getting tired.”

“Let’s eat our lunch then,” suggested Janet. “If you really feel you can’t go on, perhaps May will turn back with you, but we must have the picnic first or she’ll be dreadfully disappointed.”

Amy agreed and called to the rest a short distance ahead. “Picnic here?” asked Cutler. “Van and I are always ready to eat.”

After building a little fire by the side of the stone wall, more for fun than anything else, they proceeded to lunch, everything tasting remarkably good and disappearing remarkably fast. Indeed, the whole party laughed when the last

crumb vanished to the sound of the noon whistles blowing over Ridgefield.

“And we are used to having lunch at half-past one, after school,” said Janet. “Now, May, ducky, you will go back with Amy, won’t you? You see the rest of us want to climb at least part way up Thorn, and it is too far for you.”

May, who was a sunny child, and fond of Amy, agreed without protest.

“We will take the thermos bottles,” said Amy. “They aren’t heavy and they’ll be out of your way.”

“I suppose it is too hard a climb for May,” Cary observed, waving her hand to the two disappearing around a curve, “but I wish Amy was going with us.”

“Amy,” commented Van, “is all right at a picnic on fairly level ground, under what you might call civilized conditions, but really, she isn’t much consolation on a mountain. The place she walks is rougher and the side she climbs is steeper and the water she falls into is wetter than anybody else ever finds.”

Cutler grinned at this summary of the luxury-

loving Amy, who in truth did prefer her outings under comfortable circumstances.

Minus packets of lunch and with nothing to carry, they made good speed up the short way between their picnic place and the cottage on Thorn.

"Let's stop and ask Candace to go with us," Janet suggested.

"You ask her," said Cary. "I don't want to go in and if we all stop at the door we'll have to. Van and I'll keep on through the pasture."

Cutler delayed with Janet, and the others were half way up the steep cleared slope between the cottage and the wood-crowned summit of Thorn before they left the yard.

"Candace would like to come," Janet reported, finally overtaking the advance guard, "but Granny doesn't seem quite well so she doesn't want to leave her. And Candace thinks it is going to snow."

"Snow!" scoffed Cary, looking at the bright sunshine all about them. "How absurd!"

"I'm not so sure," said Cutler quietly. "Those clouds in the west look like it. If the wind changes, we may get it, but I hope it will hold off till we have started back again."

In a few minutes they plunged into the woods on Thorn, at first quite free from underbrush, but becoming ever more dense. Cutler went first, followed by Van and the girls in single file. Though there was no visible path and apparently nothing to indicate the proper direction, Cutler did not waver, except to skirt an occasional fallen tree. He knew and loved the five mountains of the Ridge and often camped on them for pleasure.

“Do you know where we are, Janet?” asked Cary over her shoulder.

“Only that we are on Thorn,” came the cheerful reply. “Isn’t it fun walking in the woods on snow-shoes? No, I haven’t any idea but I am willing to follow my leader.”

“Are you going by compass, Cutler?” called Cary, wondering over his sure guidance.

“A kind of one,” came the reply. “I forgot my real one, but I am using my watch as you always can, if you can see the sun.”

After a time, the way grew steep and then very steep indeed. Such violent exercise made them all hot and when they paused for breath, there was a general complaint about the coats that seemed too warm. The last stage was up

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a stony cliff, very difficult to manage, where they had to discard their snow-shoes and climb in moccasins.

Cary had twice been on Thorn during the autumn, once with her father and once with a party led by Cutler, so she knew how beautiful and extended was the view, but she was quite unprepared for the same scene in winter, with ridge after ridge of snow-covered mountains, seeming much nearer than when green. The lakes, too, were ice-bound and the rivers had vanished in the white landscape. When they turned to the other side of the summit, Cutler gave a low whistle.

"Here is Candace's snow," he remarked, indicating a gray cloud floating upon them, apparently at the level of the mountain. Almost as he spoke, it caught them in a sudden silent whirl of flakes that instantly blotted out everything save their immediate surroundings.

"Well, we must go down at once," he added. "We shall have our trail to follow so there will be no difficulty."

"Probably it will pass in a moment," said Janet. "It may be just one detached cloud. I've been up here in summer when we would

get a cloud-like fog for a few minutes and then everything would be clear again.”

“Come on,” said Cutler quietly. “Let’s get back to our side of the slope.”

Descending the steep, cone-shaped summit was even more difficult than climbing up, for the rocks were slippery and treacherous and hurrying was unsafe. Once at the bottom, there was a delay over putting on snow-shoes, while steadily the snow whirled in ever increasing volume, so thick and fast that they could see only a short distance. Curiously enough, with the snow came a kind of fog, caused perhaps by the fact that the temperature was only just below freezing.

As soon as the girls were ready, Cutler started, retracing his steps, but so fast had the snow fallen that the tracks were already filling. After half an hour’s progress he suddenly stopped.

“Didn’t we see some other tracks when we came up?” he asked.

“Yes,” Janet replied. “We twice crossed them.”

Cutler stood still, peering through the snow. To his keen eye it did not look as though the

track they were now following was that of four people. Somewhere, he had picked up the wrong trail.

“Right about face,” he commanded. “Let’s go back where we are sure of our double track.”

Janet and Van turned without comment, but Cary was startled. “Don’t you know where we are?” she asked.

“There isn’t any reason to be frightened,” Cutler answered after a pause. “We can’t see the sun, so my watch isn’t any use as a compass, but if we keep going down hill we shall get out of the woods in time, even if we don’t come out where we went in. And it is so warm, Cary, that we shall be all right even if it takes some time.”

“Nothing can happen so long as there are four of us,” added Janet comfortingly.

Thus cheered, Cary began to look upon their adventure as safe, but as a matter of fact their very number was the cause of their undoing. So confused and hopelessly mixed did the trails presently become, that they had no idea which to follow or in what way to go. The one they were on seemed to have been made by a party but was surely leading them through woods un-

familiar to all, though the fast-falling snow changed the look of everything.

“Isn’t it ridiculous that it should snow up here on Thorn?” said Janet cheerfully. “It often does even when the rest of the Ridge is clear. Very likely when we come out of the woods it will be into sunshine. Cary, you are getting tired; don’t you want to rest?”

Cary gladly stopped to lean against a sloping tree-trunk. Though she had quickly learned to walk on snow-shoes, still she was not as experienced as the others. Cutler paused with the rest, but Janet saw him glance at his watch.

“Well,” he said at length, “I think now the best thing to do, is to pay no attention to these old tracks. It was the extra ones that mixed me up in the beginning. I propose that we simply go down hill and keep going down till we strike cleared land.”

“Most sensible thing you’ve thought of,” commented Van flippantly. Janet also assented, and the four, with no further heed for the confused trails, followed Cutler, who, judging by the slope of the ground, led the way through a storm that grew steadily thicker, though fortunately no colder.

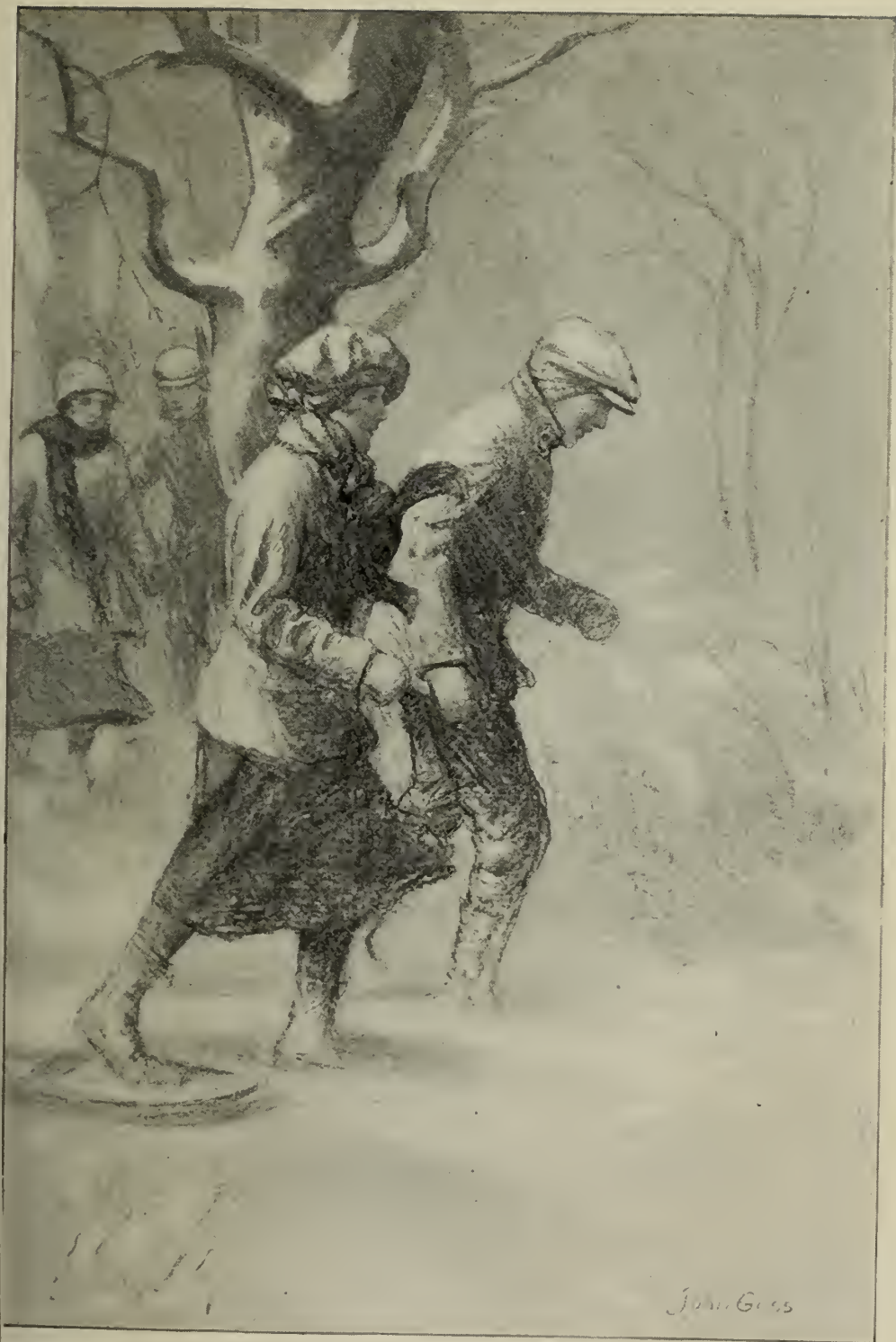
CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE STORM

Two hours later found the four still pressing on through woods that seemed endless. Cutler, silent as ever, led the way with his even Indian-like stride. More or less at one side of the girls, Van skirmished, gliding between the trees without sound.

Janet and Cary struggled along, Janet speaking occasional encouraging words, accompanied by increasingly anxious glances at Cary's pale face, which had lost the glow engendered by exercise and was becoming white. Cutler noticed this also, though he made no comment. To help any one walking on snow-shoes is not easy, for he could not get near enough Cary to take her arm, and she indignantly refused to hold the end of the proffered stick.

In spite of his apparent calm, Cutler was troubled and worried, for according to all his calculations, they should long ago have come



TWO HOURS LATER FOUND THE FOUR STILL PRESSING ON THROUGH
WOODS THAT SEEMED ENDLESS. — *Page 190.*

out of the woods, presumably on the flank of Thorn below the Halliday clearing. The situation was serious, for should darkness find them still on the mountain, they must stop and try to make camp, storm or no storm. They could count on less than an hour more of light. The only thing was to find a protected spot, collect fuel and try to erect some kind of shelter. Van would consider it merely a mild adventure and Janet Chapin was good sport. Cutler did not know Cary well enough to feel sure of her. She might play up, probably would, but he was not at all certain that she could stand much more physically,—she was looking pretty white around the gills. Cutler gradually slanted his course to bring him nearer Janet.

“Guess we’d better stop when we get to a good place,” he said in a low voice. “We’ll slip into those evergreens right ahead and see what we can do for a fire and shelter. If we can find any sort of ledge to build our fire against we’ll be quite comfy.”

Janet gave him a startled glance. She was not afraid, for she lived an outdoor life and was a good woodsman herself, but a heavy storm was raging, they were lost on the Ridge, and had

no food beyond a little sweet chocolate. Still, her common sense told her that it was worse than useless to keep on when they did not know their direction and when Cary was so tired. People at home would worry dreadfully, but they must not think of that, only do the best they could.

“All right,” she replied briefly.

Cary was now so weary that she could only just drag one heavy snow-shoe over the other, too tired to realize how precarious their situation was. She made no comment when Cutler and Janet turned toward the thick growth of evergreen looming dimly ahead. Fortune favored their choice, for almost at once they came on a rocky ledge, the base of which was so sheltered from the whirling snow that it was free from drifts. With a fire against its face they would be well protected.

Both Cutler and Janet wanted to give Cary a chance to rest, but knew that she must not stand still else she would take cold.

“Just pick up what wood you can,” directed Cutler, “and don’t lose sight of this rock. We’ll have to be quick or it will be dark before we get our fire.”

Cary summoned all her courage and stumbled toward some branches sticking out through the snow. Presently Cutler came up with a big armful.

“No lack of fuel,” he said cheerfully. “We are right on the edge of a slash where wood has been cut by the wholesale. There’s enough round loose to warm the whole of Ridgefield.”

“Where is Van?” Janet asked anxiously as she helped pile the wood.

“He is climbing round in the slash,” replied Cutler, crumpling an old envelope. “Hold your skirts so as to shelter this, Janet.”

Janet did so, but before Cutler struck the match, a call came from Van, ringing clear through the storm.

“What is that fool kid saying?” grumbled his older brother.

Van thought his remarks of importance. Since no one would come to him, he finally returned to the ledge.

“I know where we are,” he announced.

“*Do* you?” grunted Cutler. “So do I. We’re on the Ridge.”

“We are on the western slope of Cloud Mountain, not on Thorn at all,” Van went on. “If

you girls can climb across this slash, inside of five minutes I will take you to a place where there are at least twenty houses."

Janet stared openly. Cutler slowly straightened up from his position over the fire.

"Cloud?" he repeated. "You're crazy, Van."

"I am not," retorted Van impishly. "I know precisely where we are. I picked quarts and quarts of wild raspberries in this clearing last summer."

Cutler suddenly left the ledge and went again into the darkening clearing.

"I believe the kid is right," he announced laconically on his return. "If he is, we really are very near the Cloud Mountain Camp. And we can probably get into one of the buildings."

"It's worth trying," agreed Janet. "At the worst, we can come back here."

All this was Greek to Cary, who could only acquiesce in the decision of the others. They left the ledge and the sheltering woods to plunge again into the open and the full fury of the storm.

To cross the slash left by the wood-cutters was anything but easy, especially when ham-

pered by snow-shoes. Cary stumbled and fell over a tree trunk, arose doggedly and staggered on. At the next obstacle she was suddenly picked up bodily and lifted over it.

"I don't need any help," gasped Janet, stuck on the top of a big stump. "I'll be off this in a minute. Just make it easy for Cary."

Cary was past protest. She submitted with humiliation to being lifted over the worst obstacles and over a stone wall, which Van hailed with a whoop of triumph. Once over the wall they were again in woods, but among trees cleared of undergrowth, where there really seemed a path and where progress was simple and easy. Van skirmished ahead with the assurance of one who knows his ground. Within the promised five minutes after crossing the slash, they suddenly came on a little square building at one side of the path. Twenty feet away stood another and beyond that a third.

"Good boy, Van," exclaimed Cutler approvingly. "Keep on to the main camp."

"What is it?" asked Cary in amazement, for at the right appeared two more little cabins, raised on supports on the sloping hillside.

"It is a summer camp, run by a man in Cen-

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terdale," explained Janet. "These are the little cabins where people sleep. The central bungalow is not far on."

Walking became easier, for wherever there was a little house a path led to it, and the main path was well defined. Very quickly a large dark mass loomed through the falling snow.

"How are we to get in?" asked Cary, looking at the shuttered windows and the locked door Van shook vigorously.

"We'll manage," said Cutler briefly. "Under the circumstances we are justified in breaking in if necessary, but I know the ropes. I worked here a month last summer."

Sliding down a slope to the basement of the building, he crawled under the high porch and presently the girls heard him call. They followed between a pile of empty boxes and a heap of snow-covered coal to the door he had forced open.

Cary dropped on its step too exhausted to unfasten her snow-shoes, too tired to protest when Van did it for her.

"Come on," said Cutler, taking her arm. "There are stairs to climb. Bring some wood, Van."

Cary stumbled up the narrow rough staircase, to emerge in a pitch-dark cold room, damp and clammy with the feeling of a shut-up place, long unwarmed and unused. Cutler struck a match, found the lamp he expected and lighted it. The girls looked about a large room, one that would be extremely pleasant in summer, for the shutters closed tight on three sides evidently opened to make the place but an enclosed bit of the surrounding forest. There was a hardwood floor for dancing, an immense fireplace, and at one side a pretty little stage offered opportunity for amateur theatricals. Some furniture was piled around the edges, but about the chimney was a clear space and the girls sank into rocking-chairs. Presently the boys returned with loads of fuel and in a very few minutes the weary young people were rejoicing in the light and heat of a splendid fire roaring on the disused hearth.

“It was clever of you, Van, to recognize where we were,” said Janet approvingly.

“Oh, I fell around in that slash several times last summer,” said Van. “But then there’s some class to me, anyway.”

“What I can’t understand is how we have

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turned up on Cloud instead of going down Thorn," mused Cutler. "After we left the top we must have turned completely around, gone north on the Ridge instead of south. I don't see how I could have been such an idiot. Well, there's one good thing, we know exactly where we are now, and it won't be difficult to let other people know, too."

"The telephone will be disconnected," said Van, "even if you can get into the office building without smashing a window."

"I shouldn't try it," replied Cutler. "Let's see if we can raise anything to eat."

From chains in the ceiling hung several lanterns, one of which contained considerable oil. Cutler lighted this and disappeared, closely shadowed by the hungry Van.

"Cary, are you all right?" demanded Janet anxiously. She had removed her sodden moccasins and thrown aside her snow-logged jacket, but Cary still sat huddled just as she came in, the water from her clothes dripping on the floor.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "I only feel as though I never could move again."

Janet finally induced her to remove her wet moccasins and extra socks. Presently the boys

returned with a tin of tomato soup and a large dish of crackers.

“There’s flour and such stuff,” Van reported, “but everything else needs cooking.”

No one was inclined to be fussy, and the hot soup, diluted with melted snow, tasted extremely good.

“Who owns this camp?” asked Cary, quite revived by the peppery concoction.

“A man named Bunce,” replied Janet. “It is a nice place and ever so many city people come here in the summer. We really are on the other side of the Ridge, Cary, the Centerdale side, not ours. But Father knows Mr. Bunce and it is all right for us to come in and to use this soup. We can pay him afterwards.”

“Bunce is a good chap,” assented Cutler.

“This is a pleasant place for a girl to come as waitress,” Janet went on. “Mr. and Mrs. Bunce like young people and have a son and daughter older than we are. Every summer they employ half a dozen girls and some boys. They don’t have to work hard and have plenty of fun. Often they are college students who want to earn money during vacation.”

“I was here myself last August,” said Cutler.

"It's a first-class place to put in a little time and earn some cash."

"How far are we from home?" asked Cary.

"A good way," replied Cutler briefly. He was decidedly sore and mortified that his woodsmanship had been so at fault. To his boyish pride it was a hard blow that he should have confused the trail, become turned around and so completely lose all sense of direction.

"Can we get there in the morning?" persisted Cary.

"Somehow," assented Cutler.

"We aren't so very far from Centerdale," supplied Janet. "We can telephone from there and they will send for us. It is twelve miles or more by the road. Or perhaps we can find somebody to drive us over."

"Our mothers will be so worried!" sighed Cary.

"Not for long," Cutler announced. "I'm going to the village to telephone. No, Janet, I think you girls had better stay here. It's two miles and a half in the face of the storm. Oh, yes, I know there is a road, but why not stay where you are comfortable? Nothing can happen to you here and Van will keep the fire up."

"Van is going, too," announced that young gentleman.

"Not much, sonny," replied Cutler with one of his rare smiles.

Van made no reply beyond twisting his face into fearful grimaces.

"Cutler, you will go by the road, won't you?" Janet asked. "Don't try any short cuts."

"I'll only cut through the pasture here," said Cutler. "It's safe to do that, for I've walked it forty times after dark."

As he spoke, Cutler rose and started up the rough stairs leading from the living-room. Presently the girls heard him moving about overhead and soon a pile of blankets came falling down the stairs. Rather unwillingly Van helped pull three couches before the fire and spread the blankets to warm.

"I tell you I *am* going," he growled, but his older brother paid no attention to him. Janet went down-stairs to look from the basement door into the storm.

"Cutler, I hate to have you go," she said as she returned. "The storm really is dreadful."

"I can't have Mother worry," said Cutler,

who was lacing the shoes he had taken off to dry. "It isn't fair to any of our families not to let them know. I'll take the lantern, Janet. The Bunce house is the first one between here and the village. They'll take me in for the night and let me 'phone to Ridgefield. Then to-morrow morning I'll get up here somehow after the rest of you."

"If the storm is over we can walk down," said Janet with spirit. "I suppose our people will all worry, but it is a question whether it is worse for them to be frightened or for you to risk going to the village. Look at that whirl of snow that just came down the chimney!"

"I tell you I'm going," muttered Van.

"Come out and help me bring more wood," said Cutler, pulling on his woolen cap.

Neither girl knew just what magic Cutler exercised over his obstreperous young brother, but Van made no further refusal to stay with the girls. Well provided with blankets and fuel, they watched Cutler's lantern for the briefest possible space of time before it vanished into the snow.

"I think it's dangerous for him to go in this storm," said Cary with a shiver.

"Now lie down and let me tuck you in," said Janet soothingly. "We might just as well go to sleep and get rested. Nothing can disturb us here."

"Not unless Old Jim gets on the rampage," said Van suddenly. "He does revert sometimes."

"Who is he?" asked Cary uneasily.

"Oh, an Indian half-breed round these regions," Van went on. "Gets drunk occasionally, usually when there's a big storm. They *say* he wanders round the woods with a tomahawk. One day last summer he tried to scalp a man in Centerdale. They sent him up for it, but he's loose again."

"Van Richards, keep still," Janet commanded.

"Van, you're perfectly horrid," complained Cary. "I wish your father could hear you."

"Father has heard me talk most of my life," went on the incorrigible Van. "I'd just as soon discuss Old Jim with him. Once Jim took a gun—"

"Van, *please* don't," begged Janet. "Cary isn't so used to you as I am."

"Now I think of it, I believe Old Jim must

have made those tracks up on Thorn, the ones that threw us off our trail. Granny Halliday sometimes feeds him.”

“Well, if he’s on Thorn, he surely isn’t on Cloud, too,” snapped Cary, almost ready to cry between fatigue and nervousness. “I do think you ought to behave better considering that your father is a minister.”

Van chuckled and Janet laughed. She very well knew that Van’s helpless parents regarded him much as the hen looked upon her duckling child. His silent older brother was the only individual who ever much influenced this clever, impish young person, and in what Cutler’s power lay was unknown to any one else.

“Do lie down and go to sleep, Van,” she added. “The fire will keep splendidly.”

“I want to make candy,” announced Van. “There is molasses in a jug in the kitchen. Will you help me, Janet?”

Janet shook her head. “I’m too tired, Van, and besides, we ought not to take the molasses. Things we need for food are different.”

“Bunce won’t care,” Van went on. “He’s a real sport. And I’ll pay him for the molasses, Janet. I’ve some money.”

“Well-l,” assented Janet slowly. “If you’ll do that, Van—”

Van hustled into the kitchen, brought back a jug of molasses so cold that it literally took ten minutes to pour out enough for the candy, provided spoon and kettle. Cary, half-asleep and altogether disapproving, watched through lowered lids while the two with infinite trouble hung the kettle on the crane. Of course it boiled over and messed the hearth; of course it stuck to the pans and their hands, but it made Van happy.

“Janet, it’s ever so good of you to fuss so,” Cary remarked when Van was returning the things to the kitchen.

“Oh, well,” said Janet, “a bcy has to be amused, especially one like Van. It didn’t hurt me any, but now it’s nine o’clock and I am sleepy. Isn’t this place pleasant?”

In spite of snow and the rising wind, the big room was now comfortably warm, and leaping flames made curious lights and shadows in the raftered roof. There were plenty of blankets and the girls were cozy.

“Now that I’m sure the people at home know and won’t worry, this is rather fun,” said Cary

drowsily. "I hope Cutler didn't have a very hard time getting to Mr. Bunce's."

Van came back, staggering under an immense log which he added to the fire. "There!" he said, as he rolled himself in blankets and subsided on his cot. "We are all right now unless Old Jim spots our tracks and follows us over on Cloud. Old Jim is a sleuth at trailing."

CHAPTER XV

CLOUD MOUNTAIN CAMP

JUDGING from their regular breathing, Janet and Van soon slept, but Cary, who had dozed while the others were making candy, found herself wakeful. While the camp was quite sheltered by the rounded hill behind, still the wind was now sufficient to rattle the shutters and keep up a clamor, effectually preventing any nervous person from sleeping. Flakes of snow continually dropped down the wide chimney, to hiss and sputter in the flames.

Cary shifted her position and looked at Janet, who with a hand under one cheek was unconscious of her surroundings. In the fitful light of the fire her pretty profile was clear cut against the rough army blankets in which she was wrapped. Nothing was visible of Van save a shock of black hair.

“Janet is a real sport,” thought Cary. “She stood this much better than I have. Of course

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it isn't all so strange to her, and she's known Cutler and Van all her life. It was good of her to help Van with that messy candy, when it made me cross just to have him want to do it. I suppose having a brother herself, she's more used to boys. What's that?"

Cary sat up, clutching her blankets about her. It sounded as though somebody was walking heavily along the wide porch of the camp.

For a few seconds Cary sat in silence. There was no mistake. Some person was outside the building.

"Oh, Janet," she whispered in fright, reaching for her friend with a trembling hand. "There is a man walking round the porch. Listen!"

Janet woke, sat up and listened, her face grave and concerned.

"Do you think it can be that old Indian?" asked Cary in the same anxious whisper.

Janet did not reply. The sound of steps ceased, but after a moment was distinctly heard again, this time at the basement door by which they had entered.

"Van, wake up!" said Janet, casting aside her blankets and shaking his recumbent form.

“Lemme alone!” indignantly muttered Van.

For answer Janet shook him harder and Van, startled into consciousness, also became aware that some one was undoubtedly entering the camp by the lower door. It startled him wide awake as well and into a sense of responsibility for the girls.

“Janet, you and Cary sneak upstairs. Cut up there quick. There are plenty of blankets in one of the little rooms. If it is Indian Jim, lock yourselves in.”

Noiseless in their stocking-feet, the girls ran lightly up the rude staircase, but at its top Janet stopped.

“I’m going to see who it is,” she whispered. “If it’s that old Indian, he’s probably drunk and will just go to sleep before the fire.”

Van had withdrawn from the vicinity of the hearth and partly concealed himself behind some furniture where he could not easily be seen by whoever might enter. In breathless silence the three awaited the slow steps coming up from the basement.

Though slow, they were perfectly steady and certain, and the newcomer carried a lantern, for its light preceded his approach. The next

moment a man stepped into the room, so covered with plastered snow and so wrapped for protection that his features were indistinguishable. He lifted the lantern, looked at the fire and about the apparently empty room, then put down the light to remove his cap and muffler.

“Ah, Mr. Bunce!” exclaimed Van suddenly, and the speaker emerged from behind the big rocking-chair. At her side, Cary heard Janet’s sigh of relief.

“Well, sonny,” was the slow reply, “so it’s you who’s taken shelter here. Who is it, anyway?”

“Evan Richards,” responded Van. “The girls went up-stairs when we heard steps. Thought it was Indian Jim.”

“Thought so myself,” said Mr. Bunce, removing his snow-laden coat. “About eight o’clock somebody stopped at my house and said they’d seen a light on the camp grounds, so I came up along. Don’t mind old Jim’s crawling in from such a storm, but I was afraid he’d be drunk and burn the place up on me. What was it? Get caught on the mountain?”

Van quickly explained.

“I’m glad you came in,” said Mr. Bunce



THE NEXT MOMENT A MAN STEPPED INTO THE ROOM. — *Page 210.*

cordially. "Come down back to the fire, girls. This is Janet Chapin? Yes, I know your father well. He's done many a good turn for me and mine. Cary Dexter, is it? Used to see Charlie when he was a boy. Well, I hope you helped yourselves to something to eat and found all the blankets you need. Guess I'd better lug in some more wood before I take my boots off. As long as I'm here and all's well I won't peg back through the storm."

"But, Mr. Bunce," said Janet, her face suddenly anxious, "didn't you meet Cutler? He took a lantern and started for your house to telephone our people in Ridgefield where we were."

Mr. Bunce looked at her gravely. "No, I haven't seen him. What time did he start?"

"It must have been about seven," replied Janet, growing pale.

"Seven," repeated Mr. Bunce reflectively. "It was his lantern then that Abner saw. That would make the time about right. Well, that's odd."

"Did you come by the road?" asked Van.

"Yes. Did Cutler try a short cut?"

"He said he was going through the pasture,"

said Janet, her anxiety showing in her voice.

"Hm-m," observed Mr. Bunce thoughtfully, "that's probably how he missed me. Still, it couldn't have taken him long to get down to the road through the pasture. Cutler knows that path, but of course it is storming considerable."

Mr. Bunce did not say anything more. He looked at Van, and both rose; Van to pull on his moccasins, Mr. Bunce to put on coat and cap.

"Guess Van and I'll step down as far as the road," he remarked cheerfully.

"Wouldn't I better come, too?" asked Janet.

"Guess not," Mr. Bunce replied. "If you know how to build a fire in the kitchen range, Janet, you might tackle it. Won't do any harm to have a little more heat and then there'll be something ready to cook breakfast by later on."

"Will you come back here?" Cary asked anxiously.

"We'll come back," was the reassuring answer. "We'll speak, too, so you needn't feel afraid of it's being old Jim."

The two went out into the snow, each with a lighted lantern. Cary and Janet put on their

coats and moccasins and began to experiment with one of the two big stoves in the cold kitchen. Cary knew absolutely nothing about building a fire, but Janet went to work in a masterly manner that compelled admiration. Cary could only hand wood as needed, and hover about, watching her companion's expert movements.

"Cary, you would never do for a Camp Fire Girl," said Janet at length. "I must teach you how to build a fire in the woods when you haven't even any matches. This is very easy. Don't you want to take that tin pail and bring in some snow? It might be just as well to have hot water."

"Janet, do you think anything has happened to Cutler?" Cary asked tremulously.

"I hope not," Janet answered, "but I can't help feeling anxious. It's possible that he didn't reach the road till after Mr. Bunce passed the pasture path, but that isn't likely when Cutler left here at seven and Mr. Bunce didn't start from the village till after eight. Coming up to the camp is quite a climb, but going down ought not to take that long, even in a storm."

Cary looked at her watch. "It's after ten,"

she remarked. "I wish we could do something to help."

"Keeping the fires will help," said Janet. "If they go just to the road they ought to be back inside of an hour."

With many anxious consultations of their watches, the girls tended the fires, but the dials showed eleven and after, and nothing happened.

"Weren't you frightened when you heard those steps?" Cary asked in a pause when both stove and hearth had been freshly supplied and there was nothing to do but wait.

"I didn't like it," acknowledged Janet. "Van is only a kid, though he is plucky. I was relieved to recognize Mr. Bunce."

"Wasn't he nice to us?" Cary agreed. "He's a funny-looking man, but he was as kind as could be. Janet, don't you think the wind is dropping?"

There seemed a lull just then and Janet rose to pace the room. "I wish these shutters were off so we could see the lights coming. But everything facing down the hill is closed tight. Isn't it odd how comfortable we are in here?"

There came a noise at the basement door, followed by a shout from Van. Both girls flew to

the head of the stairs to look down at Mr. Bunce, half-carrying, half-supporting, the limp figure of Cutler Richards.

Neither Janet nor Cary was able afterwards to give a very clear account of that next half-hour. Cutler, chilled, though not quite helpless, with a cut on his forehead and a face disfigured by congealed blood, was wrapped in blankets on a cot drawn close to the cheerful kitchen range. Mr. Bunce, with an approving look at Janet's hot water, mixed a strong concoction of ginger and compelled the reluctant Cutler to swallow it. Van was rubbing his feet.

Midnight passed before Cutler fully came out of the drowsy state in which he was brought in. Even then he was confused and unable to say just what had happened. It was probable that in climbing the stile from the pasture into the lane beyond, he had been tripped by his snowshoes and in falling struck a rock and lain unconscious until the others found him in the lee of the wall. That wall, reënforced as it was by high evergreens, protected him from the full force of the wind and snow, else his condition would have been worse.

“Now you girls had better go in the other

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room and try to get some rest," directed Mr. Bunce. "There's nothing more we can do for Cutler and I shall bunk right here in the rocker where I can sleep with one eye on him. You others get back to your cots. I'll likely come in now and then to keep up the fire, so don't be scared if you hear me walking round."

Janet and Cary pulled their cots close together and lay down with hands clasped under the blankets.

"Do you think Cutler is badly hurt?" Cary whispered after a time.

"I don't believe Mr. Bunce thinks so," Janet replied softly. "Wasn't it a mercy he came up here? If he hadn't we should never have known Cutler was out in the storm, and—"

"No, don't," said Cary with a shudder. "I do like Cutler so much."

"He's true blue," said Janet. "I'm sorry our people haven't known that we are safe but it can't be helped. We did all we could."

"Van wanted to start out now and telephone, but Mr. Bunce would not let him."

"No, it wasn't wise," said Janet. "Let's try to sleep, Cary, but first let's be thankful together that Cutler is all right."

Both girls finally slept through sheer fatigue and a sense of safety springing from the presence of Mr. Bunce. They did not know when the fire was replenished from time to time during the night, but finally woke to the reverberation of a tin pan dropped on the kitchen floor. The storm was over, judging from the bright sunlight filtering through cracks in the shutters.

In the kitchen, Mr. Bunce was capably manipulating a smoking griddle and a bowl of batter, while Van, his face showing marked approval, placed plates, knives and forks upon the table. Cutler, his head bandaged, was looking pale, but quite himself. Thanks to the prompt first aid rendered, he had escaped frost-bite and only limped a little from the wrench given his ankle during the fall.

"All the luxuries of home," chanted Van. "Hot water for a wash if you like."

"Towels and a basin up-stairs in my daughter's room," added Mr. Bunce. "Perhaps you'll find a comb, too, though I can't be sure."

Elizabeth's room provided not only a comb, but soap and a mirror, so that the girls came down to breakfast, much refreshed by the warm

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water and rearranged braids. Were it not for the anxiety they knew the home people must be experiencing, the novelty of this camp breakfast would have induced them to linger, and even as it was, the meal was a merry one. Janet insisted on relieving Mr. Bunce at the griddle and then Cary took her place, so that all had any number of cakes, served with delicious maple syrup and coffee. Then the girls painstakingly washed the dishes and left everything in order.

“Mr. Bunce, I think you ought to let us pay you for all this,” said Janet, as she hung up the towels.

“It’s a pity,” said Mr. Bunce dryly. “I reckon that I make enough out of this camp in the summer so that I can afford to entertain my neighbors in case of need during the winter. Why, I’d have given Indian Jim his board and lodging a night like last evening! I guess a few flapjacks and a little coffee and crackers won’t break me,—no, nor the molasses either, Van. But now, if you are ready, we’ll drop along down to the village. You won’t need your snow-shoes.”

He spoke in a mysterious fashion with a queer

little smile, and the girls laughed as they looked at each other. The mystery was solved when they saw the two double-runners awaiting them outside the bungalow.

“Oh, jolly, we’re going to slide,” said Van, prancing about them in delight.

“Janet, did you ever *see* such a view?” shrieked Cary, her breath almost taken away.

Mr. Bunce smiled. He was very proud of Cloud Mountain Camp. To Cary, who had come through the dark and the storm, the vision that lay before her seemed almost unreal. Below the bungalow the hill sloped for over a mile to the lake, and beyond the lake rose the mountains; hill, lake and summits alike white and pure under their heavy covering. The air was like a combination of wine and crystal. Under the snow the evergreens bent in graceful curves, every bough laden.

The girls gazed and gazed and quiet Cutler also looked and saw more than they did.

“I keep these sleds up at camp for the young folks when they like to slide,” explained Mr. Bunce. “My girl and boy come up sometimes for a night and bring along their friends. Cutler, you’d better let Van steer, for it won’t do

to give that ankle another wrench. You two take the sled with the snow-shoes strapped on it, and I'll go with the girls. Van, you give me three minutes' start and then follow as close as you can in my track."

A slide over almost two miles of frozen crust! This was new to Cary and long before the sled lost its momentum, she felt that she knew the joy of flying. Arthur's descriptions meant more to her, for surely this was the motion of a bird, the freedom of the wind. Under Mr. Bunce's skillful steering, the sled skimmed the snow like a living thing. They finally stopped, half-way up the last hill on the road to the village.

"Only about ten minutes' walk to my house now," said their host as they rose with exclamations of delight. "I guess we'd better get Cutler to let us drag him. I don't want him to put any strain on that ankle. We'll telephone your folks and see whether it's best for you to get a man to drive you over from here, or whether they'll send for you. Road's too clogged for an automobile; you need something on runners."

CHAPTER XVI

MORNING ON THORN

THORN shone just as beautiful as Cloud that morning under its fresh white garment, but Candace, who loved the mountain and who usually looked to it with joy in its every mood, had not a thought for its wintry splendor. Granny was ill.

Granny was very ill indeed. Candace knew that when she entered the tiny bedroom after receiving no answer to her morning greeting. She had purposely omitted speaking until the fire snapped brightly and the kitchen was comparatively warm. Granny felt the cold so much now that Candace always persuaded her to wait until she could have a comfortable place to dress.

When Candace went in, Granny lay very quiet, well-covered and apparently at ease, but quite unconscious, and breathing only slowly and at long intervals. Candace felt an almost

imperceptible pulse. Granny neither saw her nor heard the despairing voice.

Candace ran into the kitchen and looked down the unbroken snow of the road. Far below rose a lazy wreath of smoke from the Parks' chimney. Her nearest neighbors were a mile down the mountain and she did not dare leave Granny.

Very quickly and efficiently, Candace filled their one hot-water bottle, put bricks in the oven to heat, and surrounded her grandmother with all the artificial warmth at her command. Then she wrote a note to Mrs. Park, tied it to Shep's collar, gave him a little basket to carry so that he would understand he had an errand, and ordered him down the mountain road.

Shep gambolled about as Candace accompanied him a few yards, but stopped, whined and looked wistful when she paused with commands for him to keep on alone.

"Shep, you must go, you *must!*" said poor Candace. "I can't leave Granny. Oh, Shep, don't you understand? Take it to Billy. Go on, good old doggie."

Perhaps the desperation in the voice of his young mistress penetrated Shep's already well-developed intelligence. He suddenly gave a

short muffled bark, as much as he could manage with the basket-handle in his mouth, and started at a steady trot down the road, picking his way among the drifts. Candace watched in relief. Once he stopped to look back, but she waved her hand and he kept on, to disappear around a curve.

“Even if they telephone Dr. Chapin right away, it will be two hours before he can get here,” she sighed as she hurried back to her grandmother’s room. “Perhaps Mrs. Park will come up. No, I won’t expect any one before nine at the earliest. Granny, darling, don’t you hear me?”

Only once that next half-hour did Candace look down the road and then it was to wonder why Shep was not back. She could hardly believe her ears when long before eight the jingle of bells reached her. Running to the kitchen window, she saw a sleigh turn into the yard and a man get out very hastily.

Candace opened the door with an exclamation that died on her lips. She did not face the hoped-for doctor, but the principal of the High School, looking both tired and pale.

“Candace!” he began, “are the—”

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The sentence stopped unfinished before the girl's frightened face. "What is it, Candace?" he added. "Better tell me at once."

"Oh, come in, Mr. Dexter. I'm so thankful to see you," gasped Candace, utterly unaware that they were talking at cross-purposes. "I don't know *what* to do."

"When did they go up the mountain?" asked Mr. Dexter quickly. Only too plain that the missing young people were not at the cottage and had not been. Mr. Richards was right. If they had found refuge there from the storm, the boys would at least have gone down as far as the Park house to telephone. "What time did you see them last?" he added.

Candace put her hand to her throat. "The girls?" she said in a queer choked voice. "Haven't they come home? Oh, Mr. Dexter! And Granny!"

"Candace, sit down," said Mr. Dexter, catching her before she actually fell. "Here, drink some water. No, we haven't seen or heard anything from all four. What about Granny?"

"She doesn't speak or know me," Candace replied, waving her hand toward the open bedroom door.

Mr. Dexter crossed the kitchen and entered Granny's room. Candace, dragging herself from her chair, saw him standing by Mrs. Halliday. He touched her hands and forehead, felt her pulse, laid a finger on her heart.

"How long has she been like this, Candace?" he asked very gently.

Candace told her story and how she had sent Shep for help.

"Here's Shep now," she exclaimed as a familiar bark and whine came at the outer door. Shep bounced in, covered with snow which he proceeded to shake off all over the kitchen, and wagging his tail violently as he presented Candace with the basket, into which was securely fastened another note.

"Mrs. Park says she will be right up," she read in joyful relief. "They couldn't get Dr. Chapin, but Dr. Greene will come as soon as possible."

Mr. Dexter looked again at Granny's peaceful, quiet face, then turned to Candace, so sure of the doctor's power to save.

"Isn't she just sleeping hard?" Candace begged hopefully.

Mr. Dexter could not speak. How could he

tell poor Candace he was certain Granny would never speak to her again? Where *were* Cary and Janet and the boys? And there towered Thorn, looking as brilliant and as hard-hearted as a diamond.

“Have you any stimulant in the house?” he asked, throwing aside his fur coat.

“There’s the stuff Dr. Chapin gave Granny for her heart,” said Candace quickly.

Mr. Dexter looked at the bottle. Carefully measuring the prescribed dose, he gently lifted Granny’s head and tried to get her to swallow the medicine, but in vain. He expected nothing else; he was only trying to give Candace the comfort of action.

“All we can do until the doctor comes, is to be sure she is warm,” he said sympathetically. “Better bring a quilt from your bed, Candace. Now tell me just when you saw the children yesterday.”

“They went past about one,” said Candace, tucking another cover carefully around her grandmother. “Janet and Cutler stopped to speak to me. The others were ahead. I watched them climb the hill behind the house, for they went up the sheep path. Cary was

having some difficulty with her snow-shoes and they didn't go very fast."

"Did they say how long they meant to stay?"

"No. It wasn't storming then, only a little cloudy in the west. Somehow I thought they probably came out on the trail to Lily Lake, and that was why I didn't see them come back. If they went that way, they would have passed the front of the cottage and we wouldn't have noticed."

Mr. Dexter scarcely heard Candace's words. His eyes still on Granny's tranquil old face, he was thinking intently. Folly to go up Thorn alone since he had no idea which way the children had wandered. There would be no track to guide him; the storm and wind had removed all chance of that. Back in the village were other anxious parents, and here was poor helpless Candace. He would trust Dr. Chapin and Mr. Richards to take thought for his daughter, for very plainly his next duty was to Candace, to remain until Mrs. Park should come.

Fortunately Mrs. Park soon appeared. She commanded Billy to hustle and Billy did. Leaving her dishes unwashed and her children

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to their own sweet will, she climbed into the old milk-pung and step by step the horse floundered up the mountain road. Fat, shapeless, and toothless as she was, she came as a ministering angel to Candace, and one of deliverance to Mr. Dexter, for her first words were of a telephone message.

"Your girl's turned up," she announced as she descended from the sleigh. "They are all four safe over in Centerdale. Mr. Richards 'phoned me and wanted Billy to head you off from climbing Thorn. Seems they missed their way and spent the night in the Cloud Mountain Camp."

Mr. Dexter waited then, waited until Dr. Greene came, waited till Granny woke, but woke in another world. Then, overcoming poor Candace's protests, he very gently insisted that she should come home with him. Mrs. Park packed a bag and Candace, dazed and numb with her sudden bereavement, submitted to be wrapped warmly and placed in the sleigh. Perhaps no other person could have had so much influence with her just then. Through all her aching pain, she knew that he was her father's friend, her teacher, and that it was right he should di-

rect matters. And for a little her pride slumbered.

That telephone message from Centerdale brought keen relief to three troubled homes. To be sure, all the parents concerned had such confidence in Cutler that their anxiety was less than had the others been alone. All were certain that he would manage wisely somehow, would do so, were they compelled to remain in the woods for the night.

It was after noon before the sleigh from Centerdale broke through the drifts, and by that time, Ridgefield knew that Granny Halliday had died that morning. Cary, coming home, with the exciting hours behind her, heard the news and found Lizzie preparing the little west room adjoining her own. She paused in her tale of adventure to inquire what guest was expected.

"I feel sure your father will bring Candace back with him," explained Mrs. Dexter. "Poor girl, I only hope she will let us take care of her for a little."

"Oh, Mammy, I'm so tired," said Cary suddenly. "I didn't know it till just now."

"Of course you are tired after such a night,"

said her mother sympathetically. "Don't you want to go to bed, dear, and really rest?"

Cary indignantly refused. "No indeed," she said. "Mammy, I do think both Janet and Cutler are such bricks. Cutler felt dreadfully because he couldn't get word to Ridgefield."

"That is just like him," agreed her mother. "Cary, you look pale. Better lie down for a little."

To this Cary finally consented. After all, it was rather pleasant to spend the rest of this unusual Sunday tucked on the living-room couch and eat her dinner from a tray. She could not keep her thoughts from Candace nor decide just how she felt about her, though she honestly tried to stifle a wish that Candace would not come. She listened intently when the telephone presently rang.

"Yes," she heard her mother say. "Yes, indeed, Charles, I knew you would wish to bring her. Her room is all ready. Give her my love. Yes, Cary is all right, just tired, as is only natural. No, the others are none the worse, unless Cutler develops a cold. Oh, he was out in more of the storm,—I'll tell you later. Make

Candace understand that I want her, that we all want her. Yes. Good-by.”

Cary turned her face to the pillow. Candace was coming. Well, perhaps it would not be for long, and of course it was a pity about Granny's death. Candace probably loved her. But it did seem as though somebody else might have taken her in. There were neighbors who had always known her, while the Dexters had come to the Butterfly House only last September. It was unfortunate that Daddy chanced to be there and so became involved. If he hadn't, probably there would have been no question of Candace's coming. It was just like Daddy, he was so soft-hearted and always doing things on impulse, like a boy. Well, she would be kind and nice to Candace, but no real intimacy need be expected.

CHAPTER XVII

CANDACE PLANS

“WHAT has become of Shep?” Candace asked suddenly.

Mrs. Dexter fairly jumped. She was alone with Candace in the cozy library and supposed that the girl, lying on the broad couch before the fire, was asleep. A week had passed since that eventful trip up Thorn and a second Sunday was drawing to a close.

Candace had been absolutely passive through the days. She assented to all arrangements proposed to her, submitted to be cared for and petted as never before in her independent life, permitted others to think and plan for her. Through all, she seemed dazed and silent, even during the service in the church, for Granny's many friends could not climb the steep mountain road through the drifted snow. This question was the first indication that her numbed faculties were beginning to wake.

“Shep is at the Parks’,” Mrs. Dexter replied.

“Billy loves him and says he seems contented. The cow and hens are there, too, Candace. They are being well looked out for.”

“I ought to have thought of them before,” said Candace after a pause. “I suppose I can’t take care of them now.”

Mrs. Dexter dropped the magazine she was reading and gazed into the fire. Sooner or later it would be necessary to have a plain talk with Candace and the girl seemed giving her an opening. Yet she was not certain that Candace was sufficiently recovered from the shock of the past week to be able to endure it. Moreover, she very much wished her husband to be present during that conversation. Candace, with her unlimited pride and fiery independence, about which there was something not wholly commendable, would be more easily managed by Mr. Dexter. While she hesitated, fearful lest she say the wrong thing, Candace went on.

“You’ve been so heavenly kind to me, Mrs. Dexter,” she said. “I have appreciated it. And I just loved one thing you did for me.”

“What was that?” asked Mrs. Dexter, coming to sit beside her young guest on the couch and possessing herself of one of Candace’s

hands. They were strong, beautiful hands though somewhat worn with hard work.

“Something very silly,” admitted Candace with the ghost of a laugh. “You’ll think so when you hear it. A long time ago, I read a story about a girl who went to visit in a lovely home, and the first morning they sent her breakfast up to her in bed. When you came in that morning with that dainty tray and had me eat propped on pillows,—why, I felt as though I were a truly princess in a fairy-tale! It was the loveliest thing that ever happened to me in all my life. And I’ve let you do it the whole week just because I adored it so, when I knew all the time that I ought to get up and dress and not let myself be waited on. I do thank you more than I can tell, and I shall always remember just how the tray and the dishes and the cunning cream-pitcher looked.”

Mrs. Dexter could not trust herself to look at Candace. She was inexplicably touched. Breakfast in bed was a common incident to her or to Cary whenever indisposed, yet it seemed such a wonderful attention to Candace. But the way she spoke, her use of tenses, indicated more to follow.

“It has been like a dream,” Candace went on, “and one that I shall think of so often. Dear Mrs. Dexter, I do thank you for everything you’ve done for me, but I can’t let you do any more.”

“What have you planned, Candace?” asked Mrs. Dexter, listening eagerly to steps on the porch. How she hoped they were her husband’s!

“There are two things I might do,” Candace replied. “Perhaps Mrs. Baker will let me keep on helping her, though I more than suspect she doesn’t really need me. And I think if Mrs. Park has the cow and the hens, she will let me live there for what help I can be with the children nights and mornings. For I *must* manage to go to school.”

To the immense relief of his wife, Mr. Dexter came into the library, bringing a breath of fresh outside air and looking cold and ready to settle down. He smiled at them both.

“Charles, come and talk with us,” said Mrs. Dexter. “Candace and I were just discussing some plans she has made and it will be helpful to have your opinion.”

Mr. Dexter gave his wife a glance, under-

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standing perfectly from her quiet tone, that the critical moment they awaited and had prepared for, was at hand. He replenished the fire and sat down in a big leather-covered chair at a right angle to the couch.

"Where is Cary?" he asked.

"She has taken Chrissy out on her sled," replied Mrs. Dexter. "Tell him about your plans, Candace."

Candace did so, though fearful that he would interrupt or oppose, but he only listened quietly to her nervous explanation of the need she felt for being independent.

"Of course you must keep on going to school," he agreed when she had finished and sat uneasily twisting her fingers in and out of Mrs. Dexter's. "But, Candace, there is some business that must be considered. You are fifteen, are you not?"

"Sixteen next June," said Candace, wondering what this had to do with the matter.

"At any rate a minor," observed Mr. Dexter. "The house and land on Thorn belonged to your grandmother, didn't they?"

"Yes, I believe so," Candace answered. "I haven't thought of it for a long time, but I re-

member hearing when Father died that the place was Granny's."

"It is therefore your own property now," said Mr. Dexter, "for there are no other heirs and everything will come to you whether Granny left a will or not. Now, Candace, the law requires that an administrator be appointed for your grandmother's estate and a guardian appointed for your person. It isn't as formidable as it sounds," he added. "And a minor over the age of fourteen may at discretion choose her guardian."

Candace looked puzzled. "I don't understand," she said.

"A guardian is necessary for a minor child," explained Mr. Dexter, "some person who agrees to be responsible for looking after the child and her property. In return, the minor is expected to look upon this guardian as the person to whom she is responsible, and to whose judgment," Mr. Dexter went on, choosing his words with care, "she is expected to defer in all matters where the opinion of an older person is supposed to carry weight,—in other words, to take the place of a parent until his ward is twenty-one. A really good guardian," observed Mr.

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Dexter in the most casual manner, "becomes personally interested in his charge and expects to be treated as a relative. The law requires you to choose a guardian, Candace, some person, of course, who is interested in you and is willing to act in that capacity. Do you know, I'd feel decidedly pleased if Andrew Halliday's daughter chose to trust me as her guardian."

Mr. Dexter ended with the charming smile that had made the boy Charles so liked in Ridgefield. Candace stared at him with eyes wide-open. Mrs. Dexter smiled back at her husband. Charles was doing very well, if the child wasn't too much overcome to take it in. She slipped an arm around Candace.

"Now, there's Thorn," Mr. Dexter went on, before Candace could do more than gasp. "I've wandered over much of Europe, and climbed many mountains that would consider Thorn only a hummock of dirt, but I have a feeling for that mountain that no other ever gave me. Andrew felt just as I do, and I know you love it, Candace, for I have seen it in your face. Somehow, I think Andrew would like me to be your guardian, and Thorn would too," he ended whimsically.

Candace burst into tears, tears of warm feeling that loosened the icy barriers shutting down around her heart, melted the stern pride with which she had determined to take up her independence and face the world alone. It was not in her nature, craving affection as she did, to resist that plea.

“Now let us return once more to business,” said her kind friend, some moments later, when Candace was calmer, cuddled still within Anne Dexter’s embrace, but much less stiff and unyielding. “I don’t know exactly the value of the land on the mountain. Probably it is not taxed for more than two thousand, but you have at least that much behind you, Candace. And the farm has an intangible value that can’t be estimated, for it has a wonderful view and good water, so that some day some rich man may want it for a summer home. That location is worth a good deal to a person who takes a fancy to it and can pay for his liking. It will be best to hold it for a time. Then the wood is valuable. When I went through the beech grove this last autumn, I saw that it was ready for cutting, and that will bring in considerable. There isn’t any need just yet for our ward to

wash dishes for the stout but estimable Mrs. Park.”

Candace smothered an hysterical laugh. She enjoyed so much Mr. Dexter’s way of stating things.

“I promise you, Candace,” he said to a more serious objection, “that I will keep an account of every penny we spend for you, and balance it against the property you own. You have accepted me as your guardian, so the first thing is to let me decide what is best for you to do. For the present, both Anne and I think you should remain under our roof.”

To Candace, used to counting every cent, the two thousand dollars so lightly mentioned seemed an immense sum. To know herself possessed of property to that amount at once removed her from dependence on kindness. And it was bliss to have this decided for her.

“If you think I ought,—” she began, with a little choke in her throat. “But it would be so lovely that I don’t dare feel it is right.”

“It is,” said Mrs. Dexter, speaking for the first time. “We want you, Candace, and this is a matter that older people should decide for you. Next June, we will discuss the question

again, but for the next six months, this is your home and you are one of our daughters. I shall treat you just like Cary,—scold you if necessary, and plan for you and tell you what to wear and say you mustn't go skating until your studying is done. Yes, and you must always get up to breakfast unless you really don't feel well enough to come down!"

That was the last straw. With rather tearful laughter, Candace concluded her bargain. They both kissed her, and Mrs. Dexter, with mock severity, ordered her to go up and make herself tidy for the chafing-dish supper always served in the library on Sunday night.

After reaching her room,—that pretty west room,—Candace stopped to cry a little. She no longer felt lonely and left out in the world. How dear these people were to her! Did friendship always mean so much? Just because Mr. Dexter had known and cared for Andrew Halliday, they were being so heavenly kind to his daughter. She hoped both Father and Granny knew all about it. And did Thorn really care what happened to her?

Candace stopped brushing her hair and looked up to the mountain, dark against the sunset sky.

She half suspected that he was rejoicing too; he looked so friendly to-night like a great guardian angel smiling down at her window. Another thought struck her suddenly. Uncle Charles and Aunt Anne, as she was to call them, had welcomed her very affectionately, but there was Cary!

Candace paused, brush in hand. Cary had been nice to her all that past week, in a strictly aloof, impersonal fashion, not once coming into Candace's room except with her mother. Now Candace thought of it, she had not been one minute alone with Cary. Janet and Amy both ran in to kiss her and say some loving words, but Cary, in the same house, was only quiet and perfectly pleasant, neither truly sympathetic nor affectionate.

For a moment Candace stood looking at Thorn. Then, because she had faced difficulties all her life, she faced this one.

"It doesn't matter whether Cary likes me or not," she thought. "I like her. I'll *love* her, and love her so hard that she can't help loving back just a little."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EXPRESS PACKAGE

CHARLES and Anne Dexter did not take so important a step as inviting Candace to share their home without due consideration of Cary. Theoretically, it would be good for Cary to have a companion of her own age, and while Mrs. Dexter knew the slight feeling of jealousy occasionally noticeable in her daughter, Cary's cordial and sincere congratulations to Candace on the night of the Hatch prize speaking, led her mother to believe this spark of antagonism extinguished. So quick a mind and such marked intellectual ability as Candace's would have won Mr. Dexter's interest in any case, but when occurring in a student with the further claim of old family friendship, he was doubly anxious to help. To his wife, Candace's extraordinary beauty and promise of latent personal charm made a strong appeal, but neither would decide so important a question without their daughter's spoken approval.

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Cary, really sorry for Candace and touched by her evident suffering during that hard week, agreed very quietly and apparently with willingness when consulted about a six-months' visit. Her assent was perfectly sincere and she meant to live up to it. Were it ever granted on good intentions alone, both she and Candace already merited angels' plumage.

Cary's imagination, however, did not compass the extent of Candace's devotion to her parents, especially the mother whom Cary herself adored, nor did it occur to Anne Dexter that Cary could possibly question the quality of her love.

Once a member of the family at the Butterfly House, Candace immediately tried to take upon herself some household duties, but Lizzie promptly ordered her out of the kitchen, announcing that she could cook her own meals and clear away her own dishes.

"You can take care of your room and help Miss Anne any way she'll let you, but I won't have either you or Cary bothering *me*," was Lizzie's ultimatum.

Seeing that the girl really missed the household burdens she had carried all her life, Mrs.

Dexter assigned to Candace the daily care of library and study, duties she herself usually attended to; Cary's share being living-room and dining-room.

Candace was naturally orderly and a born housekeeper, qualities possessed by neither Cary nor her mother. She exercised the art of dusting without disarranging and always knew where things were. Never had the southwest rooms in the Butterfly House been so spotlessly neat since the days of old Nancy Dexter, and in that time they lacked the pleasant charm and lived-in look imparted by their present occupants.

Cary hated housework of any description and made no objection one morning when Candace ventured to water the plants in all the rooms, not merely those under her own charge. Encouraged by this success, Candace openly offered the next Saturday to dust the dining-room.

"I'd just as soon," she said hesitatingly. "I know you want to get through studying and skate."

"Oh, I ought to do it myself!" sighed Cary. "Why don't you come skating, too?"

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"I don't know how," Candace admitted. "I've always lived up the mountain away from the lake. Please let me do this room."

Cary's unresisting hand gave up the duster. On the following morning, long before time for breakfast, the dining-room shone with the efforts of Candace's skilled fingers and Cary's control of it was gone. She accepted this in no spirit of gratitude, because if Candace liked dusting, it was no hardship to care for an additional room.

"Candace," said Mrs. Dexter the Saturday before school reopened, "would you like to know what became of that sketch I made of you in the big chair? I sent it to a New York publisher who wanted a design for a magazine cover. He was much pleased with it, but I feel that a part of its success is due to my model. Now, you know, Candace, that it is customary to pay a model for posing, and I want to settle my just debts. I have chosen to do it by means of that box the expressman just delivered."

Candace gave a startled look at the large package Cary placed on the table, bearing the name of a well-known Boston firm.

"Oh, but I wanted to pose for you, Aunt

Anne," she protested. "I was glad to do it. I couldn't bear to have you pay me."

"The check that came was so generous that the Red Cross received a share as well," said Mrs. Dexter gayly. "Open the box, Candace. Cary and I had great fun over that order and we hope you will like it."

"Do hurry, Candace," added Cary, whom her mother had wisely consulted in the matter. "I'll cut the string and take off the paper but you must lift the lid."

Candace knelt before the big box transferred by Cary to the rug, lifted the lid and a layer of white paper. She did not speak nor move, only knelt in silence, her face growing pale.

"Take it out," directed Cary, suiting the action to the word, and holding up a pretty one-piece dress of soft brown material, exactly harmonizing with Candace's hair and eyes. "Do you like it?"

"Like it!" gasped Candace.

"I was right, wasn't I, dear, in thinking Granny did not wish you to wear black?" asked Mrs. Dexter a little anxiously.

"Yes, Aunt Anne," said Candace rather brokenly. "I never owned anything so lovely.

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I wish Granny might see it. Is it right for me to accept it?" she asked as simply as a little child.

"Perfectly right," Mrs. Dexter assured her promptly, greatly relieved at Candace's disposition to appeal to her opinion. "Try it on."

"It fits to perfection," Cary announced after an anxious two minutes. "Candace, you are simply stunning! Isn't that white collar sweet, Mammy? It's a shade too long but it isn't hemmed, so that can be fixed in a jiffy. Isn't it becoming?"

"Yes," agreed her mother, "it couldn't be better and I like its absolute simplicity. That will do very well for school."

"School!" exclaimed the petrified Candace.

"Yes," Mrs. Dexter replied calmly. "You need another dress for the severe weather and if you lay aside your green one now, it will come in nicely for spring. Yes, Cary," to her daughter, hovering impatiently about the box.

Candace's amazement was complete when a warm woolly brown sport-coat with cap and gloves to match was placed upon her unresisting person.

“Mammy, she really must have brown shoes,” announced Cary.

“Yes, but I didn’t dare order them,” said Mrs. Dexter. “Here are the proper stockings and we will get the shoes nearer home. You look extremely ladylike and nice, Candace, and the things are both becoming and appropriate. Now, while we were planning about clothes, I also ordered a simple dress for Sundays and times when Cary wears her blue silk. I hope this will be as satisfactory.”

Candace stood dumb before the pretty gray-green gown of soft crêpe, appearing from that magic box, a little gown, simplicity itself, but exactly suiting her complexion and coloring.

“She must have slippers as well as boots,” Mrs. Dexter thought to herself. “I only hope this mood of meekness will last.”

To her relief, Candace repeated her appeal. “Is it *right* for me to let you give me these beautiful things, Aunt Anne?”

“Perfectly right, Candace. You helped me by posing, and aside from that, it gives me pleasure to see you so prettily and becomingly dressed.”

“I know my clothes are too shabby for the

Butterfly House," said Candace bravely, "and it is lovely of you to care how I look, Aunt Anne. Since you say it is right for me to have them, I'll enjoy them, oh—I love them! But I can never thank you properly."

With her last words, she knelt beside Mrs. Dexter, holding her in a tight embrace. "I wish I could do something for you in return," she whispered.

"Why, you will, never fear," said Mrs. Dexter, patting the bowed head. "Now, Cary, will you take Chrissy out while I pin the hem of the brown dress? I'm not much of a seamstress, Candace, but I know when a thing looks right, if you will take the necessary stitches."

Cary and Christine went out, and Mrs. Dexter, arranging the skirt at a becoming length, made several gentle suggestions to Candace about the proper care of nails and hair, suggestions received humbly and in good part, though Candace in truth could scarcely be criticized for neglecting such details under circumstances where she was literally too rushed to think of herself. To take thought about one's appearance beyond the point of neatness, Granny considered vanity, and Candace learned

with genuine surprise that to look one's best was a duty owed both to one's own self-respect and to others. Acting on this theory, Candace willingly permitted her glorious crown of hair to be softly puffed about her face, instead of brushed mercilessly back, even admitted the effect to be better.

Mrs. Dexter's thoughtful tact provided that Candace, wearing the pretty brown dress, should casually meet several people who dropped in for Sunday-night tea the following day; it even directed Cary, on Monday morning, to put on a frock that had not hitherto graced the Ridgefield High School, so that the admiring exclamations of their schoolmates included both girls.

One unforeseen and amusing result of that brown outfit was that the boys discovered Candace. They had always thought her pretty, but now they voted her a "peach" and offered shy attentions, which by turns embarrassed or annoyed her. Her attitude in the matter annoyed Cary, who enjoyed the boys, found them good fun, and couldn't understand why Candace scorned the whole masculine High School, even Cutler Richards, whom everybody liked.

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“Candace, why don’t you *learn* to skate and *learn* to dance?” she demanded impatiently one afternoon. “We’ll teach you, any of us. I’ll teach you to dance myself, and the next time a boy asks you to skate, *go* with him. He can take his fun out in holding you up. Better yet, you shall come out on the pond in the Chapins’ backyard where May skates, and take a kitchen chair and wobble around all you like until you get the stroke. It’s part of your education to know how to do things like that, and if you live with me, you’ll have to learn *something* frivolous! I can’t stand it if you don’t know how to do anything but read. That’s all you do when you aren’t studying. Even Chrissy can play Chopsticks on the piano, but I don’t believe you can wiggle your fingers through that! Now, listen, you must learn to frivol and, yes,—to *talk!*”

“I can do something besides read,” flashed Candace. “Cook, if I have the chance, and sew.”

“Yes,” admitted Cary, screwing her face into an expression of tried endurance, “but all that is useful, and you ought to be enjoyable too. Now you are to take Mother’s skates,—she says

so—and come over to the Chapins' with me, and waltz around that pond, hugging a good stout chair till you can stand alone, and then some of us will take you on. But mind, you must learn to talk, too, for the rest of us can't discuss Shakespeare and French and Fabre's essays on insects *all* the time. You're in danger of becoming a horrid highbrow, Candace Halliday, and I'm convinced that it's my mission in life to cure you!"

CHAPTER XIX

CARY ATTENDS A LECTURE

CANDACE was not wholly unwilling to be forced into skates and upon the ice. Her friends, expecting a strenuous time over her efforts, were agreeably surprised, for with the aid of the wooden chair she picked up the stroke remarkably soon. Being blessed with strong ankles, she was soon standing alone, and then actually skating, with Cary and Janet on either side.

“There!” said Cary in triumph, “you’ll soon be going entirely alone and the next time Larry asks you to go skating, don’t you *dare* turn him down.”

Candace herself was amazed at her success, amazed, too, to find skating so much fun. She conceded to herself in private that an hour or so spent on the ice at discreet intervals, might not be time wholly wasted, but she steadily resisted Cary’s resolve to make her dance.

Mrs. Dexter, who watched with amusement

her daughter's funny determination that Candace should learn to play, finally advised Cary not to press the matter.

"Wait till she wants to learn of her own accord," she said. "Candace made a big concession in skating and the other will come. We must remember that she is still lonely for Granny and not push her into too much at once."

"Well, I'll wait, Mammy," agreed Cary. "But I don't believe Candace will ever learn to frivol gracefully. Why are you putting on your very best suit?"

"To attend a meeting of the Mothers' Club," sighed Mrs. Dexter, "on a subject that doesn't interest me in the least, but which they seem to consider of vital importance, the 'Extinction of the Rat.' Cary, don't you think that's a terrible thing to discuss on a cold winter day in a town like Ridgefield? Have you seen a rat since we came?"

"Oh, Mammy, how perfectly funny!" giggled Cary. "If visitors are allowed, do let me go, too."

"Come if you like. There will be stereopticon views of rats. If you want to risk dream-

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ing of them three feet long, come and look at them by all means.”

When Cary and her mother reached the Town Hall, the room was already darkened for the lecture and most of the seats seemed taken.

“We can’t sit together, honey,” whispered Mrs. Dexter.

“You go on ahead,” said Cary. “I’ll find a single seat somewhere near the back and then I needn’t stay through it all.”

Mrs. Dexter went part way down the aisle to a vacant seat at the left. Cary lingered in the rear long enough to see that for some inexplicable reason, the trustful mothers depended upon Van Richards to manage the reflectoscope. Smiling with glee at the probable consequences of this misguided confidence, she slipped into a vacant chair in front of two stout ladies, and very near the back.

The lecturer, a lady from out of town, stood beside the curtain, discoursing upon the havoc wrought by rats, their evil repute as carriers of disease, and the immediate necessity of sweeping them from the face of the earth. In her hand she held a buzzer, supposed to warn the operator that a new slide was wanted, but

the arrangement was so faintly audible that Van really could not be blamed for not hitting the proper second on such slight notice. But delay was not the only variation Van managed to get into those pictures; he inserted the slides sideways, even upside down, and Cary was reduced to giggles over a huge rat lying helplessly on its back. The rat disappeared in a flash, only to loom out with disconcerting suddenness, sitting erect on its long tail, the pan from which it was feeding suspended by some occult means in mid-air. Did the lecturer mention a fine public building in New Orleans, a shanty in New York appeared; did she call attention to a laboratory where scientific workers lent their brains to the work of extermination, Van exhibited a grinning row of little darkies, proudly holding up to the world double their number of dead rats. Every queer effect that could possibly be produced with a stereopticon, electrified that audience till finally the lecturer excused herself, said the slides must be in the wrong order, since it was evidently not the fault of the operator, and went to the back of the room to rearrange them.

All over the darkened hall arose a hum of

amused conversation, for Van had certainly added to the enjoyment of the lecture. Cary, still smiling over the last misfit, suddenly heard her name.

“Yes,” said one of the two ladies behind her, “that was Mrs. Dexter who came in a little late, and sat over there at the left, Charlie Dexter’s wife, you know. They are the people who have taken Candace Halliday. I suppose it means they will adopt her in the end, but they have two girls of their own, and it’s hard on the one near Candace’s age. They’ve dressed Candace up till she’s a regular beauty. Anne Dexter’s an artist and of course it’s fun for her to have such a pretty girl about, but it’s ’most too bad for her own daughter when her mother turns to a stranger that way. I hear Candace thinks the world of Mrs. Dexter and wants to do for her all the time. What queer things people do! Some folks may think it’s well enough, but I’m mighty sorry for the other girl.”

Cary suddenly rose and went out quietly, taking one keen look at the speaker as she passed. Her first impulse was to leave the building, but on second thought she delayed at the back of the hall, until the slides were sorted and she had a

chance to speak to the boy operator as the lecturer returned to the platform.

“Van,” she said softly, coming to his side, “tell me quick. Who is that very stout woman in the second row from the back over here at the right, in the end seat, holding a bright blue hat on her lap?”

Van turned his intent eyes in the direction indicated. “A fat woman with a sky-blue hat? Oh, yes, it makes her look like a flat-headed kingfisher. That’s Emmyline Elliott, spelled with a *y*, if you please. What about her?”

“Nothing,” replied Cary, “only I overheard her say something I didn’t like.”

“Forget it,” said Van concisely. “Nobody in Ridgefield ever starts anything in the least out of the ordinary but Emmyline Elliott fixes her false teeth in it. Don’t talk now, Cary; I have to turn loose another rat.”

Cary went out into the keen air. She knew Van’s advice was doubtless based on real knowledge of the person involved, but in spite of it she choked back a sob as she set her face toward the Butterfly House. Any one meeting her would have noticed only that she was in haste, but Cary was thinking hard and rebelliously.

She very well knew that Candace adored her mother. Little by little she thought over events since that day when they were storm-bound on Cloud. It was true that Candace watched every opportunity to do any slight service for Mrs. Dexter; just yesterday she cleaned her palette. Cary never thought of doing that in all the years she had watched her mother paint. Candace did the mending whenever she could,—Cary's mending as well. She sharpened drawing-pencils; she never let Mrs. Dexter go upstairs for any errand that she, Candace, could do as well. She amused Chrissy when that young person evinced a disposition to intrude upon some sketch; when they gathered round the fire in the evening while Daddy read aloud,—now Cary thought of it,—Candace would almost always contrive to hold one of her mother's hands. Certainly Mammy had been very keenly interested in those clothes for Candace, pleased because they were so becoming. Yes,—Cary faced it at last—Candace was truly beautiful and of course her mother enjoyed that. It *must* be nice for her to have such a pretty girl about.

“She's far prettier than I am,” thought Cary bitterly. “I know it and I'm willing so far as

she's concerned, but it's terrible if my mother, my own mammy, likes her best just for that! And she is exceedingly clever. Mammy was so pleased with her report last month. She's ranked the whole school so far the entire year, and though I had honorable mention, mine wasn't scholarship of the first grade. It isn't fair for Candace to have both brains and beauty."

Poor Cary! All the way home, all the time she was shut into her own room, she spent thinking of incidents of Candace's devotion and her mother's evident appreciation, finally coming to the conclusion that there was nothing at all to do, no way out of the matter but to suffer in silence. She heard her father come in, heard Chrissy laughing delightedly as he romped with her, and felt an impulse, which she had far better have followed, to run down, sit on his knee and beg him to tell her that Candace could never usurp her place either with him or her mother.

After a while, Candace came into the adjoining room, looked into Cary's, but did not see her in the dusk where she sat huddled in a chair overlooking the snow-bound lawn. Chrissy's pattering feet followed and from their conver-

sation bedtime seemed imminent. Cary did not stir. She permitted Candace to put the little sister to bed, did not even go down when she heard Candace in the kitchen, for it was Lizzie's afternoon out, and lately on that day the two girls had helped prepare dinner. She sat alone in the dark until her mother returned.

"You didn't stay through the lecture?" she asked as Cary came into the hall. "Not that you missed anything, for Van mixed no more slides and things were painfully dull. Is Candace getting dinner alone? Why, Cary, you ought to be helping. Run down and tell her I'll be there just as soon as I slip into another dress."

Without a word, Cary went down to the kitchen. She slapped butter balls into their silver plate, filled the glasses, cut bread, but did not speak to Candace, who after her first pleasant greeting remained unanswered, ventured nothing beyond an occasional puzzled glance in Cary's direction. Mrs. Dexter came out, took the roast from the oven and tasted Candace's mashed potato.

"Nobody seasons potatoes quite so nicely as you," she remarked. "I'll make the gravy."

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"Here is the thickening ready," said Candace, presenting a bowl.

"Thoughtful child," returned Mrs. Dexter. "Would Lizzie let us have spiced grape if she were here? Let's risk it, Candace."

Candace climbed on a chair to reach the top shelf of the preserve closet.

"There's something sticky up here," she said. "I'm afraid a jar has broken."

"Find it if you can," directed Mrs. Dexter, stirring her gravy. "Hold a lamp, Cary, so she can see."

Cary took the lamp and held it up stiffly.

"I have it," announced Candace, taking from the shelf a small jar of strained honey and holding it from her at arm's length. The next instant the damaged bottom dropped out and the honey descended in a sticky mass upon the top of Cary's unprotected head!

"Ow!" shrieked Cary.

"Oh, don't drop the lamp!" cried her mother, abandoning the gravy and rushing to the rescue.

"Candace, how could you!" moaned Cary. "You did it on purpose! Oh, you horrid thing! Mother, it's running down my neck!"

“Cary, stop dancing up and down and come over to the sink,” commanded Mrs. Dexter, with difficulty suppressing her amusement, for Candace, a tragic figure of horror, stood on her high perch, the broken glass still in her outstretched hand, dribbling slow drops upon the floor, while Cary, almost beside herself with anger and disgust, was equally funny.

“I’ll never forgive you, Candace Halliday. I’ll get even with you for doing this! Mother, it does *feel* so!”

“I didn’t mean to, Cary,” Candace began.

“You did!” snapped Cary.

“Girls, don’t talk about it,” commanded Mrs. Dexter. “Candace, don’t let that gravy burn. I’ve scraped off all I can, Cary.”

“It’s ’way down my spine!” groaned Cary.

“Now go up-stairs the back way,” said Mrs. Dexter, rolling a towel around Cary’s sticky head, “straight to the bathroom and undress and take a bath. I’ll come and shampoo your hair. Candace, put these ribbons into the fire and then give Mr. Dexter his dinner.”

“But do eat yours,” said Candace, almost in tears. “Let me help Cary. Oh, I’m so sorry!”

"I won't let you help me," declared Cary wrathfully. "I shall never forgive you. It *isn't* funny, Mammy, there's nothing in the least funny in having a whole hive of honey poured down your neck! I shall never think so, long as I live. And she *did* do it on purpose."

The honey-streaked Cary was so absurd in her wrath that her poor mother had to struggle mightily with a desire to laugh. But Candace looked shocked to her very soul.

When Cary, still sputtering violently, had vanished up the back stairs, Candace turned to Mrs. Dexter.

"I never meant to do it," she said solemnly. "I didn't know it was over her head. I didn't know the bottom would drop out."

"Of course you didn't," choked Mrs. Dexter. Then she sat down in Lizzie's rocker and laughed until she cried.

"Will she ever forgive me?" asked Candace still so solemnly that Mrs. Dexter laughed again.

"Yes, she'll get over it," was the comforting response. "Cary is a little pepper-pot while she is upset, but her storms are brief. When her hair is washed and she is comfortable again, she will see how ridiculous it all was. I won-

der if I dare trust myself to go up-stairs now.”

Fully two hours passed before Cary emerged from the bathroom, cleansed from honey, to drop exhausted into bed, ready for the dainty tray of dinner, which Candace brought to her door, and handed to Mrs. Dexter, whose eyes, in spite of the strenuous task of shampooing her daughter's hair, were yet laughing. Candace herself had not been idle during their period of seclusion. Lizzie's kitchen required considerable cleaning.

Next morning, after a night's rest, when Cary might reasonably be supposed to take a less personal view of the episode, Candace again tried to apologize, but Cary coldly refused to discuss the matter.

CHAPTER XX

VAN VISITS THE LIBRARY

FROM different directions but at the same moment, Amy Richards and her brother Evan arrived at the Ridgefield Public Library. Van politely opened the outer door for his sister.

Amy regarded him suspiciously. Extreme courtesy on Van's part was never a favorable symptom; still, no immediate outbreak seemed impending. She stepped into the empty vestibule where on the woodwork of the basement door hung a neat little framed sign: "Please brush off snow." Below the sign stood a broom.

Like the tidy, docile child she was, Amy brushed her boots with care, handed Van the broom and pushed open the door into the reading-room. Van swept his moccasins, replaced the broom, looked thoughtfully after his sister, took down the sign, drew a pencil from his pocket, wrote a few hasty words upon the brown

paper back of the frame, hung it up again with the frame reversed, and demurely entered the library. The sign now read: "Please close door to keep out mosquitoes and monkeys."

At the desk sat Miss Gilbert, the librarian. Van was on perfectly good terms with her, rather liked her in fact, and did not really mind her smile when he fell over chairs as he usually did, for it was uncommon for Van to spend any length of time in any room without tripping over some piece of furniture. He would have been grieved to know that Miss Gilbert and her assistant usually spoke of him to each other as the "baby elephant," for a sense of humor was the last thing with which Van credited a person reputed to know as much as Miss Gilbert. Yet she could scarcely have been the successful librarian she was, had she not possessed a very keen appreciation of the ridiculous and also the power of keeping her amusement to herself.

Van cautiously surveyed the reading-room. Mr. Dexter might be present and just now Van was not anxious to encounter the principal of the High School, having only that morning passed some mortifying moments in the office,

during which his sins of omission and commission were pointed out to him with painful clearness and lurid detail. The interview ended with a command to Van to transfer his books and personal possessions to a desk in the corner of the office, and to occupy said corner when not actually engaged in recitations, until such time as Van, through exemplary conduct, should cause Mr. Dexter to forget his presence.

Mr. Dexter might be lurking in the stacks or yet in the reference-room, but to a superficial inspection the coast was clear. At one table sat Janet Chapin and Candace Halliday, whom Amy had joined, perhaps by appointment. Old Mr. Neilson sat reading a paper. Six small children were choosing fairy-tales. Two ladies were looking at magazines. Mr. Gardner was consulting an encyclopedia. Several feathered hats were visible in the fiction stacks.

Van advanced to the desk, successfully negotiating one table and four chairs, and asked Miss Gilbert for a life of Satan.

The librarian, though inured to many strange questions,—she had just been asked for Shakespeare's Lamb Tales—was startled into looking

searchingly at Van. The mischievous scamp was probably trying to be funny. But Van appeared perfectly serious.

"What do you want to know about Satan?" she inquired.

"I want to know where he was born and when he died and what his education was," Van explained politely.

For a second Miss Gilbert was silent. There was a familiar sound to these questions; she had been asked before for information of this nature, though never in connection with the Prince of Evil. What could the boy mean?

"What have you been reading, Van?" she asked.

"'Wild Animals I Have Known,'" replied Van with perfect frankness. "It's on the required freshman reading list and I have to find out something about the author."

Miss Gilbert bit her lip. "Oh, yes," she said. "That author is usually called Thompson-Seton. You'll find him in this book."

Van took the fat red volume and turned away, quite unconscious that the librarian left her desk to enjoy a quiet laugh in a secluded spot. Seating himself at a table commanding a view

of the whole room, from which he could keep watch upon all who went or came, he wound his feet around the chair-legs, and placed the book in such a position that he could read while resting his chin upon the table-edge. So contorted, he looked the imp he was, and Janet, catching one eye peering around his book, smiled back at him.

Candace did not see Van. Intent upon getting up a topic for the morrow's weekly lesson in "current events," she paid no attention to anything except the reviews about her. Every Friday the last recitation period was devoted to a public résumé of affairs of present interest, and students from each of the four classes spoke for three minutes upon subjects of their choice. To-morrow, Cary, Candace, Albert Frost, and Harry Jackson were to represent the sophomores.

Mr. Dexter emphasized the importance of these brief speeches and through them stirred the school to real interest in their history-making times. Never before had father's morning paper been so eagerly demanded by the youth of the town, never had the weeklies in the public library enjoyed so many readers. Many a

country home was brought into closer contact with the happenings of the world, just because the echoes of the Friday current events class penetrated to the four corners of Ridgefield.

Candace had chosen her topic: the introduction of the English "tanks" on the battle-front of the Somme. She spoke of it to Aunt Anne, because she could not find in the study the exact magazine describing them, and Mrs. Dexter recommended the file at the public library. Deaf and blind to all about her, Candace was trying so to condense and digest the account that she could give it accurately and concisely within the time permitted by the little three-minute sand-glass on the principal's desk. Having finished her preparation, she noticed the heading of the next article: "Women's Work in the War," and stopped to read it.

Across the room, Van chewed up a pencil, made a few notes concerning the author he had so innocently maligned, and rose to exchange his reference book for a volume of detective stories.

Just within the sheltering stacks, the Reverend Henry Richards was looking through a book of essays. He knew that his daughter was in

the library, for she had dutifully come to speak to him, but of his son's presence he remained in blissful ignorance until a terrific crash in the otherwise quiet room, informed him of Van's probable arrival.

Why Evan could not enter even the church without falling over a kneeling-bench or a pew-end or some other perfectly stationary article of furniture, was a mystery to poor Mr. Richards. And why a modest, unassuming preacher of the gospel and his placid, conventional wife should have thrust upon them a problem like Evan was a greater mystery and one that seemed beyond explanation. Cutler, a most satisfactory addition to the family, had remained so. Obedient, studious, taciturn, with manly traits of character, Mr. Richards could honestly say that Cutler had never given him a moment's anxiety. Amy was all that could be desired of a daughter, but from babyhood, Evan calmly threw the family conventions and proprieties to the winds. To do or say what might naturally be expected of him, seemed impossible, and poor Mrs. Richards looked upon him with unfeigned alarm, not to say despair.

Fortunately in the depth of her husband's

personality, was a flicker of imagination, a feeble spark at best, but a glimmer sufficient to save Evan from forcible coercion. Mr. Richards did not understand his son, but he respected his individuality. So firm was he in his opinion that physical discipline was worse than useless, that Mrs. Richards, helpless to cope with the situation, repudiated all responsibility and left Evan, as she piously expressed it, in the "hands of the Lord,"—doubtless the best place to which she could have consigned him.

But the parish enjoyed the rectory youngest, and even critical tongues spoke kindly of Van's pranks. Only the organist and choirmaster, Mr. Gillespie, after enduring Van as a member of the choir for four rehearsals and two Sundays, politely but firmly refused to tolerate him longer. He accused Van of no definable sin, merely stated that his presence was productive of sinful conduct in others. Van's mother was sorely disappointed, but Van privately congratulated himself on having so soon and so easily accomplished his dismissal.

On another occasion, temporarily thrust by an admiring junior society into the presiding chair, Van injected some "punch" into a missionary

meeting by requesting all in favor of a certain motion to raise the right leg.

When this shocking conduct was reported to his mother by a highly scandalized older sister—Cutler, be it noted, merely grinned—Van was unable to offer any valid excuse.

“It was Amy’s fault, Mother,” he declared. “She sat there looking so proper, and I thought how funny she would be with one of her white stockings up in the air, and I *had* to say it.”

Yet there was a newcomer in Ridgefield, who bade fair to understand Van and eventually help him shape a rather brilliant destiny, though Van would have scoffed at such a possibility, especially after the interview of that morning. Mr. Richards received an inkling of this one day when discussing his three children with the principal of the High School. Mr. Dexter made no comment on his eulogy of Amy, agreed in cordial praise of Cutler, but made a puzzling remark concerning Evan.

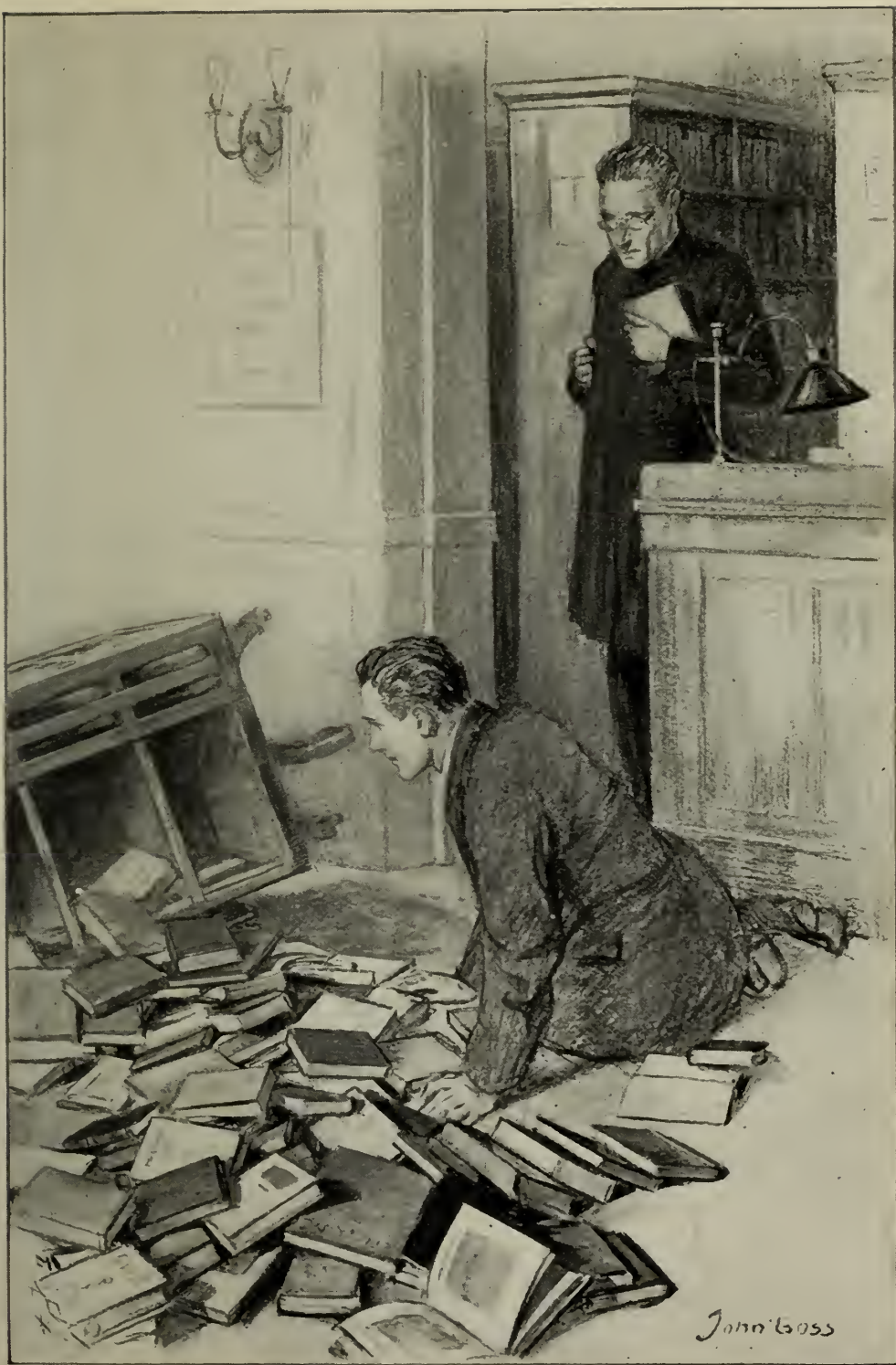
“Wait a few years,” he said. “Cutler is all you claim, but while he may count and classify the morning stars, Van is the one who will hear them singing together.”

This crash in the library reading-room

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sounded only too familiar, and with a pained expression on his countenance, Mr. Richards emerged from the stack to find Van picking himself out of a chaos of books amid suppressed giggles from other observers. Who but Van Richards could manage to upset a solidly constructed revolving bookcase and do it while apparently passing at a safe distance?

Fortunately no damage resulted. Mr. Richards assisted his scarlet-faced son to right the stand and replace the books. Then he spoke a word of apology to Miss Gilbert. As he left the library, he considered taking Van with him, but perhaps the boy was really looking up references for school work. In the vestibule the sign caught his attention. In surprise he read its amended version, but he was not at all surprised to recognize Van's writing. For a second he stood wondering whether to call Van out of the library and make him erase his mischief, but after the pause he continued on his way out of the building. He did not even restore the sign to its original reading. Truly, that faint spark of imagination flickered sometimes to the credit of the Reverend Henry Richards as well as to the salvation of his son Evan.



MR. RICHARDS EMERGED FROM THE STACK TO FIND VAN PICKING HIMSELF OUT OF A CHAOS OF BOOKS. — Page 276.

CHAPTER XXI

CURRENT EVENTS CLASS

NEXT day, Candace awaited her turn in "current events" with an anxious heart. She was sure of her subject, sure she could treat it concisely and within the proper time, but to speak in public was never easy.

This particular exercise included the whole school, and was always held in the big hall. About two hundred pupils were present, and while all knew one another, there were few who did not feel embarrassed to rise before that company and talk without notes.

When the school assembled, the teachers also came to listen and Mr. Dexter took his seat upon the platform. First, the seniors spoke, followed by the lower classes in turn. No one was announced, but was expected to rise spontaneously in proper order.

Cary Dexter, as coming first alphabetically, would speak first of the sophomores, Candace Halliday third, following Albert Frost. Can-

dace was determined to make her topic a success, partly because in every way she wished to please Uncle Charles, partly for her own fierce pride in her scholarship.

Relations between her and Cary were still strained, for since the episode of the broken honey-jar earlier in the week, Cary showed no further desire to teach Candace to "frivol," and Candace fell back upon her books to console the feelings wounded by Cary's continued coolness.

To-day's exercises were going well. All the senior speeches were interesting and to the point; with one exception the juniors merited praise,—Tom Colbert took more than the allotted time and was obliged to leave half-told his account of the American ambulance work. Next came Cary's turn.

Candace did not know Cary's subject. She had asked, and received the short answer that it was undecided, but later heard Cary tell her mother that her preparation was completed. She rose, dainty, graceful and self-possessed, and for a second Candace gazed at her wistfully. Cary had enjoyed so many advantages in her life; she had always lived in a lovely

home, worn pretty clothes, traveled and known interesting people. Truly, she was very charming. But *what* was Cary saying?

Candace's heart almost stopped beating. In her pleasant voice, with a nice choice of words, Cary was describing the British "tanks" and their use on the battlefield!

Candace gasped with horror. In a daze, she listened to such phrases as "caterpillar traction," "armored fort," "bridging the trenches." Cary had taken her topic, her very own topic, stolen her subject, left Candace to make a mortifying failure, for failure it must be, since she was to follow immediately after Albert's speech, a speech that gave her but three minutes' grace.

For a moment, Candace was furiously, sickeningly angry, angry as she had seldom been in all her life. Cary's voice faded into nothingness as a sudden hot gust of fury swept her from head to foot. Yet through her rage she found herself thinking steadily, quickly. Time enough later to consider whether Cary *meant* this; what she must face now was the question of her speech, close upon her.

Cary concluded and sat down amid generous

applause, for she was popular, had undoubtedly prepared her subject carefully and spoken extremely well. She did not glance in Candace's direction.

Albert rose to announce his topic as the "Taking of Jerusalem." Three minutes left for Candace! She looked up just then to meet Janet's eyes.

Janet had no idea of what was happening. No one saw anything unusual, least of all, Mr. Dexter, who only thought that his attractive little daughter had done herself credit. Candace looked white; Janet thought she was frightened at her approaching trial, therefore sent her an encouraging smile.

Candace loved Janet, of whom she saw much more since coming to the Butterfly House, and that smile decided the matter. When Albert sat down, blushing over justly earned applause, Candace rose.

She was so pale and held so tightly to the back of the chair before her that Mr. Dexter, reversing the tiny sand-glass at her first word, feared she was going to fail. But Candace's voice was perfectly steady and calm.

"I am going to tell you something of what

women are doing in the war," she announced, and went on unfalteringly to enumerate and characterize various phases of self-sacrificing work. Not once did she swerve from her main topic, not once did she hesitate for a word, to all appearances it was a perfectly planned and perfectly delivered speech and it ended just as the last grain of sand dropped from the upper half of the glass, yet through all, Candace had a curious feeling that it was not she who was speaking, but somebody quite different, somebody entirely unconnected with Candace Halliday. She was startled when her schoolmates began to clap.

When she sat down she looked at Cary, whose eyes were bent on the platform. There was a little flush on her cheeks, perhaps caused by the excitement of her own speech, but Cary's appearance was innocence itself.

Candace did not listen to the freshman topics. She was certain that Cary had been in the room when she was looking for that account of the tanks, sure she heard Aunt Anne's advice about going to the library for the missing periodical. This was doubtless the way Cary had taken to "get even" for that baptism of honey, which she

couldn't see was absurd, nor be willing to forgive.

And what a revenge! Nobody could ever prove that she did it purposely; if taxed with it, Cary could politely deny any previous knowledge of Candace's subject, perhaps declare, and possibly with truth, that she selected it first.

The flood of indignation that carried Candace through her ordeal, subsided as suddenly as it came, leaving her tired and feeling as though she had been pounded. Janet gave her another smile, this time to convey her appreciation of Candace's success. She received a pathetic little one in response, not at all as though the speaker herself was satisfied.

Directly after that period, school was dismissed, and Candace, mechanically gathering her books, went to the dressing-room.

"You did splendidly," Janet assured her. "I'm sorry you were frightened, Candace. You needn't have been for you and Cary were best of all."

Others also congratulated her, but though Candace made suitable replies she did not regain her natural color and hastily put on her wraps and escaped into the air.

How she wished she were climbing the mountain road back to the gray cottage on Thorn! To sit at the same table with Cary Dexter, as she must do within fifteen minutes, and act as though nothing had happened, seemed an impossibility. Every mouthful of food would choke her.

The clear, cold air soon swept the tangles from Candace's brain, and before she was half-way home, she could think more clearly, even feel more charitable toward Cary, who, after all, did have a terrible time with that unlucky honey; could realize that as things stood, she had decidedly the best of the affair. Not only had she avoided the ignominious failure Cary anticipated, but had risen to the occasion and risen very well.

With this conclusion her spirits rose a little. Cary could make no comment without betraying herself, and Candace would take good care not to speak of the matter. She would keep absolutely still and let Cary think that she, Candace, had simply changed her mind and meant all along to speak on women's work in the war.

On reaching the Butterfly House, Candace ran up to her room, brushed her hair and

washed her hands, for she had been quick to fall into Anne Dexter's dainty ways. She heard Cary enter the adjoining room on a similar errand, but neither spoke.

Luncheon was served as soon as Mr. Dexter came in. At sight of him Candace felt uneasy. Suppose he should make some comment on the exercises of the last hour! Nothing would be more natural, since both girls had taken part. Candace steeled herself for this possibility, but the attack came from quite another quarter, when Mrs. Dexter, having completed her duties of serving, looked at her family.

"Why, Candace, how pale you are! Aren't you feeling well?"

"I think I must be hungry, Aunt Anne," said Candace, turning the color of a beet.

"Were you frightened when your turn came to speak?" asked Mr. Dexter, looking at her. "You did very well, Candace. So did Cary. I was proud of both my girls."

At any other time, this speech would have warmed the cockles of Candace's loyal heart, but she scarcely heard it in fear of what might follow.

"Oh, the tanks," said Mrs. Dexter with inter-

est. "I don't think you told me your choice, Cary."

"You're mixed, Anne," said her husband before the confused Cary could speak. "Cary spoke of the tanks; Candace gave us an excellent summary of what women are doing in the war."

Anne Dexter wasn't easily "mixed" and she was very certain which of the two girls went to the public library after the missing number of the *Scientific American*. But she was also extremely quick-witted, and one glance at her daughter's face, now as flushed as Candace's, made her sure that something had gone wrong at school, equally sure that Mr. Dexter did not know about it.

"Probably some consequence of that honey," she thought to herself. "How silly of Cary to harbor a grudge for a mere accident. Well, it's no use to say more and perhaps precipitate a scene."

"You'll be interested to know that Chrissy's crow has turned up again," she said with a sudden change of subject. "Mrs. Randall telephoned me this morning and said her maid rushed down-stairs screaming and declaring

there was an evil spirit in her room. When Mrs. Randall went up, the crow was on the maid's bed with his wings stretched so that he looked enormous and seemed to cover half the quilt. Nothing would reassure the maid but to have the window-screens put in as though it were summer."

At mention of her quondam visitor, Chrissy monopolized the conversation, and nobody again referred to the current events class. But Candace, venturing a look at Cary, found Cary stealing a glance at her, and from the way Cary's eyes fell, she knew beyond a doubt that her choice of subject that morning was no chance coincidence.

CHAPTER XXII

ON RIDGE ROAD

AFTER luncheon, Mr. Dexter took his skiis and left to meet the group of boys with whom he had promised to climb Cloud; Mrs. Dexter returned to the little smock she was embroidering for Chrissy, Candace went up to her room and Cary disappeared.

About three, Janet came. From her window, Candace saw her walking quickly up the street and paused in her task of darning a stocking, to see whether she would stop or go on to Amy's. But Janet opened the gate of the Butterfly House.

Candace started to go down, then stopped, wondering whether the call was meant for her or for Cary. Under ordinary conditions she would have run down at once, but such thundery atmosphere demanded caution. Only a few moments passed before Janet's feet were heard on the stair.

“Our Lady Anne said you were up here,” she remarked gayly as she tapped at Candace’s door. “Come out and slide, Candace,—that’s a dear. Where is Cary?”

“I don’t know,” Candace replied, putting down her darning-ball. “I don’t believe I’ll go, Janet. I’ve studying to do.”

“But it’s Friday,” protested Janet, “and the Ridgefield High School is permitted, yea, encouraged, to play upon Fridays. The coasting is fine. Cutler came for our big double-runner and all the others are out with theirs. It will do you good, Candace, and it’s a positive duty to enjoy such a wonderful winter day. Put on an old skirt so you won’t care what happens. Mother made me wear such a wreck that I feel like a rag-bag. I wonder where Cary is.”

“Were you asking for Cary?” said Lizzie’s voice in the hall. “She took her knitting and went off toward the rectory.”

“We’ll stop and see if both of them won’t come,” replied Janet. “But Amy doesn’t care much about sliding and I expect Cary’s too dressed-up.”

“I’ll be ready in a minute,” said Candace, slipping off her new school dress and going to

the closet for the shabby old serge skirt dating from the days on Thorn.

Over at the rectory Cary was established on the couch with her army sweater, while Amy at the piano was picking out hymns. Now hymn-playing, even though indulged in during a secular day and hour, is really not an occupation to be seriously criticized, but his sister's performance was driving Evan nearly wild.

To begin with, Amy was not truly musical, and Van, though nothing could induce him to sing, possessed a correct and sensitive ear. Then Van simply couldn't endure hymns, and he had heard a good many during his short life. It was not the hymns themselves that he so disliked, but the peculiar effect they produced upon him,—twisting his insides somehow awry, giving a queer sensation to his knees and his throat. He was always dumb when hymns were on the program. Amy's present choice was one of his pet aversions, well-calculated to torture his inmost feelings. In these days, he frequently suffered from it in church.

“Wake in our breast the living fires;
The holy faith that warmed our sires.

Thy hand hath made our nation free;
To die for her is serving Thee."

Van set his teeth and plunged deeper into the hall closet in search of his missing glove. Where *had* it gone? His precious coasting moments were fleeting fast. Worse and more of it! Cary was humming also. Well, she could at least carry the tune.

"Amy," said Van in desperation, appearing at the door, "I saw a mouse under that piano—"

Amy gave a wild shriek, threw up her hands and took refuge beside Cary on the sofa. Both girls curled up their feet.

"There's my glove," exclaimed Van, discovering it by the fireplace where he had himself left it to dry. "Cary, why don't you come coasting with the bunch?"

"Amy and I are going to knit," replied Cary.

"Amy," asserted Van, pulling on his recovered glove, "knits exactly the way a donkey comes down hill."

Cary giggled as Van, with expressive forefingers imitated the eccentric motion of his sister's needles. "Isn't he dreadful?" she commented as the door slammed behind him.

“Dreadful isn’t the word,” sighed Amy. “He is the most *impossible* boy.”

The door suddenly opened to admit the head of the impossible boy. “I forgot to mention, Amy,” he said, grinning wickedly at the two, “that the mouse was under the piano last Sunday.”

“Last Sunday!” groaned his sister when Evan had really gone. “You know my new muff I had Christmas. It slipped to the floor during service, and Van not only knelt on it but stood on it. He said his feet were cold and it made an excellent prayer-rug. I didn’t tell Mother because she is so discouraged anyway with Van. This morning she sent him down cellar to bring six eggs from the jar of water-glass. He fell up-stairs and broke five. Then when he came into the kitchen, the gas-stove broke, and as far as any one could see, he merely *looked* at it.

“On Wednesday,” Amy continued the catalog of her brother’s misdemeanors, “there was a choir supper at the church, and Mother sent a dish of scalloped macaroni. She packed it carefully in a basket and gave it to Van to take to the parish house. He put it on his sled and

coasted down hill with it. Well, the macaroni was eatable and it was eaten, but its good looks were gone forever.

"This past month his school report was terrible," Amy went on in a shocked undertone. "He had 'Excellent' in all the studies he likes and 'Unsatisfactory' in everything else, and of course in conduct. Van is so queer. Father hopes Mr. Dexter will have some influence over him if anybody can."

"Daddy likes Van," observed Cary. "I know he does and he thinks Van has a lot in him."

"He has," Amy assented fervently, "and if some of it ever gets out of his system, it will be a blessing. Here are Candace and Janet and they probably want us to come sliding. Do you want to go?"

"No, let's stay here," Cary answered quickly. "I don't feel like romping this afternoon,—and I don't care to be with Candace," she added to herself as Amy went to the door.

"What! stay in when the snow is white and the sky is blue and the pines are green?" exclaimed Janet. "Oh, well, if you are so anxious

to get your knitting along, though we'd like your company. Tell Cary to come around by High Street when she goes home. Mrs. Dexter said she'd come that way from the Red Cross meeting and slide with us a few times."

Amy closed the door and Janet ran to overtake Candace, sauntering slowly on, reported the failure of her mission and the two joined a merry crowd at the top of High Street hill.

The street, so-called from its elevation, ran along the foot of the Ridge, but it had little claim from the number of its houses to be known as a street, for it was nothing but a hilly country road, offering an excellent place for coasting. The incline fell steep, leveled out, dipped again, with no sharp bends to prevent the steersman from seeing his path far before his flying sled.

No small children were on the hill when the girls arrived, for the youngsters preferred a gentler slope and a shorter climb, but half a dozen double-runners were in use and about fifty people were coasting.

Half-way down High Street hill, another road led off, turning down a steeper slope into town. Because of the abrupt pitch and sharp curves,

this road was less favored by coasters and only an occasional venturesome spirit strayed from the straighter path.

Cutler saw the girls as soon as they came and since he was using Arthur Chapin's sled, called them to go down with him. The coast lasted a good three-quarters of a mile, and as they turned to climb back after the third descent, another double-runner passed, steered by Van Richards and bearing Mrs. Dexter among its merry young passengers. Candace and Janet waved their hands.

"Let's wait for her," they agreed, and permitted Cutler, Ned and the Jackson twins to go ahead.

For the next slide the coasters redistributed themselves. Cutler's sled was almost filled when the others reached the top and Van pulled his smaller runner about.

"Stump you to go down Ridge Road," he called to his brother about to start.

"Cut it out, Van," Cutler said. "Too heavy a load for that hill."

He added something else which none of them caught, as the sled slid into the distance. The light snow rose before it in a powdery shim-

mering cloud, the waving colored mufflers of the coasters made a bright spot in the shining landscape.

“We’re not too heavy,” said Van perversely. “I’m going to try it.”

No one objected, for neither the girls nor Mrs. Dexter had been down Ridge Road that winter. Van took his place at the wheel, Janet came next, then Mrs. Dexter and Candace last. They flew down High Street, swerved from the beaten track, and dropped down the first steep dip of Ridge Road.

Had the driver of the empty wood-sled which was climbing by the less-used way, remembered to put bells on his horses that afternoon, Van might have heard their jingle; had there been any previous coasters on the road, the driver might have given more thought to which side he took at a curve, but there were no warning bells and the first the teamster knew was when the double-runner with its merry crew flashed upon him, coming thirty miles an hour.

Evan did his best. He jerked the wheel to the right, brought the sled into the gutter, but the rear runners slewed.

Half a minute later, Van, unhurt except for a

bumped head and a bleeding nose, picked himself up. From a bank of snow at his left, Janet was rising. Candace was already on her feet, but in the middle of the road, quiet and motionless, lay Mrs. Dexter.

CHAPTER XXIII

VAN'S EVENING

BAD news, like rumor, travels far and travels fast. Though the accident took place on an unfrequented and lonely road, little time elapsed before word reached Ridgefield. It sped down High Street Hill on a flying sled, it hastened up Main Street by a passing automobile, gaining in horror at each house.

When Mr. Dexter, with his merry young companions, slid down Cloud and skied into town, pitying eyes watched his progress. His wife had been coasting, Evan Richards had upset the sled, and her wrist and ankle were broken. The next house had both wrists and one ankle; a third claimed it to be three ribs and her back; the fourth that it was her neck. The one point on which all were agreed was the responsibility of Van.

Back on the wood road, where three terrified young people and a much frightened teamster

stood around Mrs. Dexter's unconscious person, Van was experiencing the bitterness of despair. All the High School students admired the talented, charming wife of their principal, but Van's feeling for her was mute adoration. And now he had doubtless killed her!

Disregardful of his bleeding nose, he stood in dumb horror. Janet, ever self-possessed, was first to shake off the paralysis of fear that held them all. Flinging herself on her knees beside Mrs. Dexter, she began to apply snow to the colorless face. After a few seconds the gray eyes opened, looked vaguely at Janet, only to close again.

"Thank Heaven! she's alive!" muttered Janet. "Lady Anne, dear Lady Anne, tell us where you're hurt."

No answer came to her pleading and Janet continued to rub her face with snow. In a moment Mrs. Dexter spoke, though she did not open her eyes.

"That's enough, Janet. Just let me lie quietly until I get my breath."

"Dear Aunt Anne," sobbed Candace, "are you hurt?"

Two or three minutes passed, minutes that seemed an eternity to the anxious watchers.

"Help me sit up, girls," she said at length, "but don't touch my left arm. I think it's broken."

At the unnatural, limp position of that arm, Candace gave a gasp of horror. Holding Mrs. Dexter in a sitting position, Janet still knelt in the road.

"Don't be frightened," said Mrs. Dexter after another pause. "I think it is only my arm, except that I feel dreadfully shaken to pieces."

"I'll turn my sled right round and take you home," offered the teamster. "There are horse-blankets to sit on, and the girls can sort of ease you along. As for you, Van Richards, you've a good man for a father, but how you ever happened to be his son beats me!"

"Don't. Poor Van!" murmured Mrs. Dexter, too faint and ill to offer further protest.

So the coasting party came sadly home. At a distance the dejected Van followed, wishing at every step that the earth would open for him as for Marcus Curtius, or that in place of a

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Roman forum where a gulf might yawn, Thorn would change into Vesuvius and bury him in an eruption of flame and lava.

Rumor reached Cary, still at the rectory, and she flew home in terror, arriving just as did Mr. Dexter, who skied through town on the wings of the wind. Already the sun had dropped behind the Ridge, and kindly darkness fell about the mournful arrival, a sheltering curtain that concealed Anne Dexter's white face and weary attitude, Janet's skirt, fit only for the ragman now, Candace's tumbled hair and tear-stained cheeks.

Nothing like trouble or danger shared in common can so quickly sweep the dominance of self from our souls. During the rest of that strange confused evening, neither Cary nor Candace thought of the differences and dissension between them. Dr. Chapin set the broken arm, a very pretty break, he styled it, examined every bone with care and pronounced Mrs. Dexter otherwise unhurt except for the nervous shock.

Cary waited on the doctor, helped her mother to bed, flew up and down stairs like the loving daughter she was. Candace found her hands full with little Christine, who, frightened by the

confusion, wanted the mother she could not have. Candace coaxed her into Lizzie's pleasant kitchen, prepared her supper, told her stories while she ate, and then carried her upstairs to make a frolic of undressing and bath. She tucked Chrissy into bed with a good-night song, doing all so successfully that the contented baby went to sleep without further fretting for her mother.

When the regular breathing showed Candace that the little one would not know of her going, she stole quietly down again, to meet Lizzie in the hall.

"Candace, will you tend the bell?" she asked. "It rings all the time, either that or the telephone, for half the town is asking for Miss Anne. My bread has riz up on me, and it will sour if I don't turn to and shove it in."

Candace assented willingly. Cary and her father were both with Mrs. Dexter and she would do anything to be of service. Slipping into the living-room, dark and deserted, she snapped on the low table-light. As she turned to the hearth where the logs had fallen apart, she stopped with a gasp of surprise.

"Van, how you startled me!" she exclaimed,

recognizing the boy huddled on the couch.

Van lifted a misery-stricken face. "Is she going to die?" he asked mechanically.

"Oh, you poor boy, hasn't any one told you?" said Candace sympathetically. "Dr. Chapin says she isn't hurt except for the shock and her arm. There's the bell again."

Candace went to answer it and Van, listening to voices in the hall, recognized that of his father. Acting on blind impulse, he dashed for the nearest door. Alas for Van—his ill-luck held and he landed in the sitting-room closet.

Some one entered the room; Candace's feet passed up the stairs over Van's head; others descended.

"Oh, is it you, Harry?" came the principal's voice.

"Yes. How is she?" asked the rector anxiously.

Again Van listened to a synopsis of Dr. Chapin's verdict. There was no escape from that closet and it wasn't dishonorable to listen, for he couldn't hear anything good of himself. Nobody in Ridgefield could possibly have a good word to speak for him.

"It is a genuine grief to us that Evan should

have caused this accident," Mr. Richards was saying. "My sons seem fated to get your family into difficulties. I didn't blame Cutler so much, but Evan—"

Could Van believe his ears? Mr. Dexter, who only yesterday gave him such a terrific overhauling, was actually taking his part.

"Why, this was wholly an accident. I don't feel inclined to criticize Van. The girls, Anne herself, say he did the best he could."

"Cutler told him not to coast on Ridge Road, told him it was dangerous. Evan should have taken heed."

"No boy likes to obey orders from an older brother," came the reply. "Don't be hard on Van; he knows his mistake now. Is he at home?"

"We haven't seen him," said Van's father in a discouraged tone. "If Evan were like most boys, I should expect him to show proper distress and remorse, but he never seems to feel things like other people."

It was then that Mr. Dexter made the most astonishing comment of all.

"Doesn't feel?" he repeated. "I grant that Evan doesn't show his feelings, but I give him

credit for having them, and rather intense ones, too."

They passed from discussion of Van and his shortcomings, but the involuntary listener did not forget that remark. It gave him courage when the outer door closed upon his father, to steal from his hiding-place and intercept Mr. Dexter in the hall.

"Oh, will you tell her," he begged, "just tell her that I never meant to hurt her?"

"Why, she knows it, Van," said the principal kindly, not showing the slightest surprise at Evan's sudden incarnation in his front hall.

"I wish I'd smashed up myself," Van went on brokenly, but stopped with a single eloquent gesture of both hands, a motion that arrested Mr. Dexter's attention, occupied with other matters though he was. He had watched Van with interest at the prize-speaking, struck by the boy's unusual power of interpretation. Dumb and inarticulate though he seemed, Van could express himself and, moreover, possessed something worth putting into words. An amused thought crossed Mr. Dexter's mind. How would Van's gentle, unworldly father and his conventional mother feel if their ugly duck-

ling should some day make himself famous? That Van was not merely clever and eccentric but had real and genuine ability of some kind was Mr. Dexter's private opinion, as yet shared with none but his wife. But how Van's tragic eyes burned in his white face! This was the boy characterized by his own father as "unfeeling."

Mr. Dexter's own eyes grew very kind. He had forgotten that youth could suffer so intensely.

"Van, you shall see and tell her for yourself," he said gently. "That will be best for you both. Come up with me."

At the head of the stairs he stopped. "Would you mind stepping into the bathroom first?" he asked. "You see your nose has been bleeding and the effect, when one sees you suddenly, is, er—, rather startling," he ended delicately.

Anne Dexter was lying in her four-posted mahogany bed, rather white and shaken, but there was a cheerful note of color in the red ribbons with which Cary had pinned each of her mother's two braids to the upper corners of the pillow. A little reading-lamp shone on the table by her side and the fire snapped brightly

on the hearth. The room was very quiet, when Van, with an immaculately clean face, came shyly in alone. Mrs. Dexter held out her uninjured hand in welcome.

Van had meant to express his deep regret and sorrow for the accident, but when he saw her looking like a little girl with hair parted and braided, so white and still except for her starry eyes, words deserted him. He abruptly turned away and hid his face.

“Van, dear boy,” said her gentle voice, as her hand clasped his closely. “Do you know,” she added after a pause, as she saw that he could not speak, “years ago I had a baby son. He died when he was only a year old, but if he had lived, he would have been your age now. It’s queer, but ever since I’ve been in Ridgefield, I have had such an odd feeling about you,—you of all the boys I’ve met,—as though you were the one my baby might have been. Somehow, I feel sure he would have been like you, Evan, and I should have gone sliding with him and had a smash-up.”

Still Van did not say one word. There seemed no need for anything more, and both were silent until Van recalled that he had been

told to stay but a moment. He gave her one look and then stumbled out, blinded by tears. The principal, loitering in the upper hall, after a glance at him, withdrew to the shadows and permitted the boy to go down-stairs and out of the house alone.

“Well, did Van make his peace?” he asked, entering his wife’s room when the door had closed upon their visitor.

His Anne smiled up at him. “Now you mention it, I can’t recall that Van spoke to me, but his silence was truly eloquent. I understood without any words all he had to say.”

CHAPTER XXIV

A TRYING SATURDAY

THANKS to a telephone message from the Butterfly House, transmitted before Evan reached home that evening, he was received without reproaches, if without enthusiasm. He looked pale and disheveled, but mentioned neither aching head nor sensitive nose, only too glad to escape everything except the forbearance and patience characterizing the family atmosphere. Cutler was the exception; he completely ignored Van, though during supper he several times looked searchingly at him across the table.

Like the fog in the poem, the snow next morning came "on little cat feet." One moment the sky above Ridgefield arched gray but clear; the next found it dimmed with silent flakes.

They drifted past the six windows of Anne Dexter's chamber where her wakeful eyes knew their first arrival, they clung to the Butterfly on Cary's side of the house, they entered the wide-open window of the room at the rectory where

the Richards boys slept, tickling Cutler's face until he rose to lower the sash. Yawning vigorously, Cutler went down to the furnace. When he returned to dress, Van still lay motionless in the other twin bed.

Under no circumstances would Van ever get up of his own volition and it was a part of Cutler's routine to pull his sleepy and protesting brother out of bed at the proper moment. Cutler was nearly ready to perform this part of his morning program, was fastening his collar, when Van amazed him by getting up without assistance. The next second Cutler received a shock yet more serious for, reflected in the mirror, he saw his brother start to cross the room, stop in the middle, waver and collapse into a limp heap of blue pajamas.

Never a person of many words, Cutler was one of prompt action. He dropped his collar-stud, picked up the unconscious Evan, deposited him again in bed and summoned a horrified mother, all before a minute passed.

After a while, Van came to himself, to find Dr. Chapin doing uncomfortable things to his person, feeling his spine, fingering his head, asking questions, to which, considering them

foolish, Van returned equally foolish answers. Finally the doctor produced a tiny electric torch and a small mirror, with which he flashed a ray of light into each of Van's big eyes and looked searchingly after the ray. Then he gave a little nod and requested Mrs. Richards to bring him a glass of water.

Van endured the inquisition patiently. He knew Dr. Chapin from intimate association during mumps, measles, chicken-pox, and a light attack of scarlet fever, when Van, confined to the third story of the rectory in charge of a trained nurse, refused to stay in bed and spent most of the time either conversing through a megaphone with admiring friends in the street outside, or in decorating the room with a frieze of devils cut out of red paper and pasted round its top. His nurse, by the way, required three weeks' rest before undertaking another patient. To this list of childish complaints was added an attack of pneumonia, caused by skating on thin ice, a broken collar-bone, a dislocated finger, a strained wrist, both ankles sprained at different times, and a shoulder out of joint.

Like most people who did not have to live with Van and were not responsible for his con-

duct, Dr. Chapin found the boy both interesting and amusing, and when Mrs. Richards left the room, he looked scrutinizingly at his patient.

"I can't find any reason to suspect you've cracked your head," he remarked cheerfully. "What is wrong with you, sonny?"

"I wish I were dead," replied Van with startling brevity.

"Oh, no, you don't," said the doctor, not at all disconcerted. "You only think you do. We can't get rid of life's perplexities so easily as all that. If we could die every time we are up against something hard, I'm afraid few of us would live to grow old. It would be a cowardly way out of our difficulties, when you stop to think about it. I just telephoned Charles Dexter," he added apropos of nothing. "His wife had a very comfortable night. Her head is much better and her arm doesn't pain her seriously. She is coming out of it very well, very well indeed."

As he spoke, Dr. Chapin looked kindly into Van's white face. A little flush crossed it and the big black eyes closed.

"You aren't in pain, are you, my boy?" he asked again.

"No," said Van quietly, "only my head aches when I move and I feel rather sick. I don't know what made me flop on the floor. I didn't sleep very well," he added.

"I thought that was about it," said the doctor. "You must remember that you were shaken up yourself, as well as worried because you happened to be steering when an accident happened that might have occurred to any one. Now, won't you try to sleep and not worry any more?"

"I'll try," agreed Van, "but I wish Amy needn't come in here. She,—she is so virtuous that I shall have to slam things if she does."

Dr. Chapin smiled as he took his departure. "I can't find that anything much is wrong," he said to Van's parents. "It is just the shock, both mental and physical. Keep him in bed if he will stay, and better not let him see many people, perhaps not even Amy."

Over in the Butterfly House the family were early astir, Lizzie flying about her kitchen, prepared to rise to any emergency, to accomplish three times as much as usual should occasion demand. Cary in her blue corduroy kimono crept softly to her mother's door, was admitted for a

kiss, and returning to her own room, met Candace.

"Can I do anything for Aunt Anne?" Candace asked anxiously, encouraged by Cary's quiet answer to her first query about the patient's night.

"No," said Cary. "I'll do anything Daddy doesn't. I wish you'd look out for Christine."

"Of course I will," Candace hastened to assure her. "Cary," she added hesitatingly, "won't you forgive me now for that honey? It was all an accident and I've felt so badly about it."

"Oh,—the honey," remarked Cary, looking blankly at Candace, as though she really couldn't turn her mind so far into the past. "I don't care about that. I don't care about anything now, only I want to wait on Mother myself. You see the people who come and look after Chrissy."

She went into her room, leaving Candace to wonder whether Cary, who no longer cared about the honey,—indeed, didn't seem to remember it,—had also forgotten the "tanks."

Dr. Chapin's visit, her mother's breakfast and toilet occupied Cary for most of the morn-

ing. About eleven, Mr. Dexter went out to keep a business engagement, and Mrs. Dexter inquired for the other girls.

"Candace, I haven't seen her," she said. "And my little Chrissy, where is she?"

"I guess one has been keeping the other busy," replied Cary. "Ought you not to rest, Mammy?"

"Let me see them first. Candace's hands must be full, else she would surely have come in before this."

"I told her how you were," said Cary, and she had no choice but to summon Candace, who came gladly, bringing little Christine with her.

"I was missing my other girls," said Mrs. Dexter, returning Candace's kiss. "Careful, Chrissy, you must hug Mother very, very gently."

"Mammy's hair is unbuttoned," announced Christine, touching with delighted fingers the long braids again tied to the pillow corners.

"Very much so," laughed her mother. "Sit down, Candace dear, and tell me how things are going with you. I know Cary must want to get away for a few minutes, though I really don't need any one with me all the time. I shall

get up to-morrow,—I could to-day, so far as I feel, though Dr. Chapin insists on my staying here. What is the outside news? Have you seen Van?"

"Van is sick," said Candace. "Amy telephoned that they don't think it is serious, because Mrs. Richards found a package when she was straightening his room, with a circular bath-spray he brought home. She had never seen one like it and when she asked Van what it was, he told her it was his new halo, so they think he'll be all right by to-morrow."

"I'm glad Van feels like joking again," said Mrs. Dexter, smiling. "If Chrissy is really going to play with that box of buttons, do you want to read aloud, Candace?"

"Oh, I'd love to, Aunt Anne," exclaimed Candace, reaching for the volume indicated.

Mrs. Dexter lay quietly, listening to Candace's pleasant voice with its expressive intonations. Before long her eyelids drooped.

Candace read more and more softly, till she thought it safe to stop. Then with a whispered caution to Chrissy, she led her from the room. Just at the door she met Cary, looking perfectly distracted.

"I was coming for you," she said. "Is Mother asleep? Oh, what a horrible day this is! The tank has run over."

"The tank?" queried Candace, her mind returning to the current events class of the preceding morning.

"Oh, in the attic!" said Cary fretfully. "It has to be filled every other day. Lizzie turned the water on as usual with that wrench over the kitchen sink—you must have seen it. Just as I came out of Mother's room, she told me it was on and that she was going over street to give some orders and for me to shut it off in ten minutes. I forgot. If I'd stayed with Mother, Lizzie would have told you, and you'd remember," Cary ended rather vindictively.

"But what has happened?" asked Candace, still at sea.

For answer, Cary impatiently indicated the side hall where a flood was pouring down the attic stairs.

"Have you turned off the water?" demanded Candace, galvanized into action. "Then we must wipe it up."

This sounded a simple proposition and the

two started bravely to mop the deluge, finding to their horror, the floor of Christine's room inundated and the bathroom ceiling soaked like a sponge. Try as they might, they could not seem to keep up with the water, seeping through the thoroughly soaked floor.

"I wish Lizzie would come," said Candace after half an hour's hard work made little impression on the disaster. Chrissy was in Cary's room, quiet over her sister's trinket-box.

"She'll be horrid cross when she does come," sighed Cary. "She'll say it is my fault."

But Lizzie, like many sharp-tongued people, was sometimes unexpectedly charitable. When she arrived, she surveyed the two girls, both desperately working, and shook her head.

"What a mess!" was her only comment. "Cary, you're as wet as sop. Give me that cloth, and you go straight and get into dry clothes. It's possible to wipe up water without wading into it up to your neck. Candace isn't half-drowned. Candace, you fetch the tack-lifter. All the matting here in Chrissy's room must come up. Now, don't either of you say

one word of this to Miss Anne. I won't have her worried. What possessed the old tank to run over to-day, of all days?"

By luncheon, the flood was stayed and merely the discolored bathroom ceiling and Chrissy's bare floor remained to tell the tale. Mrs. Dexter, waking from a refreshing nap, noticed only that Cary, who brought her tray, had changed to an afternoon dress. Her luncheon showed no trace of a disorganized household, and no one told her of the hominy burned black while Lizzie helped the girls, the wreck of one carefully arranged tray, dropped by poor Cary, the minor tragedies of groceries that did not come and a telephone that rang steadily. All that afternoon, Candace vibrated between door and receiver, until at last, utterly tired out, she dropped asleep beside Chrissy's crib, moved into her room, lest any dampness remain in the other. The one bright spot in that terrible day passed unnoticed by either girl,—the fact that ever since the tank ran over, they had been pleasant to each other.

CHAPTER XXV

CARY GOES SHARES

THOUGH she spent but one entire day in bed, for the next three weeks, Mrs. Dexter was dependent upon the services of her daughter, for naturally with her left arm in a sling, she could not arrange her hair nor dress without assistance.

Very quickly the family in the Butterfly House settled into a definite routine. Cary dressed and went down to arrange her mother's tray; Candace dressed Chrissy. After breakfast Cary helped her mother, while Candace put the house in order. Then they hurried off to school, and Lizzie kept an eye on both Chrissy and Mrs. Dexter.

"Why don't you and Candace change occupations?" Cary's mother asked her one evening. "Don't you want the fun of tending Chrissy sometimes? Candace would give me the little help I need now."

"Don't you *want* me to help you?" Cary asked playfully, as she brushed her mother's hair before the open fire.

"Of course, I want you, dearie. I only thought you might like a change and that Candace also would be pleased. She seems so pathetically anxious to wait on me. She has been a real help to us, hasn't she?"

Cary suddenly laid aside the brush, knelt on the rug and clasped her mother tightly.

"Mammy," she whispered after a pause, "I know Candace is lovely to look at, and she can do ever so many things I can't, and she manages Chrissy much better than I do, but, Mammy, you are *mine*, you know. I can go halves in you with Christine, but not with Candace."

"Cary, you ridiculous child! Look at me this instant. Do you mean to say you are absurd enough to be jealous?"

"Absurd or not, I can't stand it if you love her too much."

"Oh, Cary," said her mother, laughing. "I thought you had more sense. What a silly little girl!"

Cary's embrace tightened as Mrs. Dexter's cheek rested on the top of her head.

“I do love Candace,” said her mother gently. “I think I must love any young thing for whom I was in any way responsible, and Candace is very lovable, but as for usurping your place,—why, Cary, only when you have a child of your own, will you know how impossible that is. Nobody can ever be to me what you and Chrissy are. Never think that again. Daddy and I are interested in Candace and have grown to love her, but beautiful and charming as she is, she isn’t our Cary.”

“Mammy, I have been horrid to Candace,” confessed Cary, a little later, lifting a teary face upon which happiness now shone. “The very day your arm was broken, I played a mean trick upon her. Listen to what I did and then see whether you can keep on loving me.”

“Candace was certainly very quick-witted to change to another topic on such short notice,” said Mrs. Dexter when she had heard the tale. “Have you made it up with her, Cary dear?”

“We haven’t had time to think of our disagreements,” Cary admitted. “I don’t believe she has thought of it again any more than I did, till now, when I was realizing what a horrid person I am to be your daughter. No, you

needn't say it, Mammy, I won't be such a little idiot again, and I'll let Candace have her share of you."

Candace surely received a surprise that evening when Cary came from seeing her mother into bed. "I've decided it is time for you to resume learning to frivol," she announced. "So, to-morrow, I'll dress Chrissy and you may take up Mother's tray. And, Candace, I'm terribly sorry and ashamed about those tanks."

"For mercy's sake, Cary, it isn't running, is it?" exclaimed Candace, in dismay.

Cary giggled in spite of herself. "I didn't say *tank*, but the plural," she went on: "Your current events topic. It was hateful, but, oh,—everything went wrong with me! I can't begin to tell you about it, but you don't care now, do you?"

"No," said Candace, somewhat puzzled, for Cary had evidently been crying and yet seemed in gay spirits.

"Just hit me with a poker the next time I'm horrid, will you? Because it won't be Anne Dexter's daughter who's doing it, but a changeling in her place," was Cary's enigmatic request, but she put her arms around Candace's

neck and kissed her, a token of affection that brought tears to the other girl's eyes.

The second victim of the coasting accident soon recovered both physical and mental balance. Van was not at school the first Monday, but on Tuesday appeared at the assigned desk in the principal's office in such a state of meekness that Mr. Dexter with difficulty concealed his amusement. After anxious inquiries for Mrs. Dexter, Van obliterated his personality for the remainder of the morning.

"Van," said the principal at the close of school, "I believe you were to sit in the office until such time as I should forget your presence. I have done so literally to-day, so I suppose the penalty expires automatically. I wish I could be sure that the reform were to be permanent."

"I guess it will last longer than you think," Van answered very quietly.

Mr. Dexter gave him a keen glance. "I'll take your word for it," he replied as briefly, and for the next month derived much entertainment from the outspoken comments of his staff of teachers, all at a loss to account for the sudden goodness of Evan Richards.

At the end of three weeks the splints came off the injured arm, but some time passed before Mrs. Dexter regained its full use. Cary was as good as her promise, she showed no further disposition to prevent Candace from being with the invalid, and only dropped furtive kisses on her mother's head or hands in passing, that indicated deep feeling. Candace accepted with joy Cary's resumed friendship, indeed, never suspected that the estrangement had been from jealousy instead of resentment over an unfortunate accident. Candace's school work suffered during those busy weeks, bringing her and Cary more nearly on a level. That she could accept a lowered mark with equanimity, knowing it had fallen because of higher duties, in itself indicated that Candace was less in danger of becoming Cary's "horrid high-brow."

"I saw such a funny thing, Mammy," said Cary, coming in one afternoon, dressed to go out. "When I came from school, I looked up Chestnut Street as I crossed. You know how hilly it is, and you know, or rather you don't, being too precious and easily breakable to be

allowed out, how very slippery everything is to-day.

“I looked up the street and in the center, sitting right down, fat Mrs. Fenway was coasting down the hill, not on a sled, understand, but just flat on the street. About three feet to one side of her, and exactly keeping pace, slid Mrs. Fenway’s market-basket, out of which stuck several parcels, including a package of Post Toasties. Some distance behind Mrs. F. sprinted two brave men, madly trying to overtake her and the basket. One after the other, each sat down and joined the procession. I, at the foot of the hill, remained rooted to the spot. As Mrs. Fenway progressed nearer me, her smile grew wider and mine widened to correspond. Finally she came to a gentle stop a few feet away. I was about to help her up, but she said I’d better not because if she fell again and landed on me, I’d be merely a pressed flower! Consider, Mammy, your lovely sylph-like daughter as a pressed flower!

“One of the men overtook the basket and picked it and himself up, but the other skewed into the gutter part-way down the hill and

abandoned the chase. It was funny, for Mrs. Fenway must weigh over two hundred. Van says she's so fat that you can't get within two pews of her at church! She laughed herself, for she couldn't help knowing how very queer she and the basket must look."

"Cary, I must make a sketch of that coast," laughed her amused mother. "Are you going down to the village?"

"Yes, with Candace. She wants to do an errand and I have one too, so we are going together," Cary replied, slipping the ring of her muff over her wrist. "I always take my lynx on a leash for fear it will escape. Shall Chrissy go?"

"I think it's hard walking for her and she was out a long time this morning. Have a good time, both of you."

As the two girls started, Mrs. Dexter looked after them affectionately. Both had improved from the living with each other. Candace was much less shy and awkward, Cary, less pugnacious and quite inclined now to accept Candace on a sisterly basis. They went down the walk chatting very amiably.

At the rectory, where they stopped to see if

Amy would come with them, they found her busy over a delayed essay which must without fail be handed in the next day.

“I chose from the list they gave us, ‘Why We Are at War,’ ” sighed Amy, “and I went to the library, expecting to get a nice book about it, but all Miss Gilbert would give me was President Wilson’s address to Congress, and it is very difficult. And Van is so trying. He’s suddenly taken to behaving properly at school, but he has dreadful relapses at home. He made a little electric motor that worked quite nicely and persuaded Delia to let him attach it to the egg-beater. It worked,—it worked very well, but during the process the eggs absolutely vanished. Nobody understands what happened to them, but Van thinks so much air was pumped in that they evaporated. He wanted to try beating butter and milk together, but Mother would not let him. It might have worked, or the whole thing might have turned into cheese, but Mother said both were too expensive to waste. So then he put it on the sewing-machine, but started the treadle too soon and the machine needle went clear through his finger. Mother and I are both tired out.”

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Candace and Cary were laughing as they went their way. Their errands took them past the shopping district and down a steep hill leading to the lower village. At the top of this incline stood a very heavy auto-truck, piled high with machinery. The driver had gone into the corner drug-store.

"What an enormous load," Cary observed as they passed.

"Isn't it?" agreed Candace. "Is Chrissy to have a party for her birthday next week? Aunt Anne spoke of it before her accident and since then it has been crowded out."

"We'll plan something," replied Cary. "Last year when she was three, Mother invited six children and their mothers and we had a beautiful time. But after everybody had gone, we found the birthday cake in the pantry. Mammy forgot all about it and so did I! She thought she was a very unnatural parent to make a party for her child and forget the most important thing. Good gracious, Candace, what is happening!"

From behind came shouts of alarm or warning or both. The girls turned to see the big auto-truck, no one at the wheel, sliding down

the hill and gaining momentum each second. The brakes, set when the driver left it, had broken or worked loose; the truck once started down that slippery slope was a terrible menace.

Farther down the hill, people on the sidewalk made abrupt dashes for shelter at either side, warned by the frenzied shouting. Fortunately the road was clear of vehicles, but half-way up, right in the middle of the street were two tiny children from the French-Canadian settlement, dragging a sled behind them.

Stiff with horror, Cary shrank back against the wall, but Candace did not hesitate. Disregarding the frightful object careering down the hill, she rushed for the children, seizing one with either hand and dragging them toward safety. But the little ones, jerked off their feet by her sudden onslaught, were a dead weight. Stopping where she stood, Candace deliberately lifted first one and then the other, sliding them across to the sidewalk.

At that moment the truck blotted her from the sight of the terrified Cary. She heard the crunch as the sled, left in the street, crumpled like a match under the powerful wheels. The truck passed, to continue its mad career until

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it crashed through a stone wall and dropped into the river, but Cary did not see what became of it. On the other side of the street, where she had been tossed by the monster, lay Candace. Beyond her, safe on the sidewalk, clutching each other and screaming with fright, stood the two little children.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

LONG ages afterwards, Candace came back from a world where it seemed that she had been forever, a dim, gray world with zigzag flashes of lightning playing on a distant horizon in a dreadful monotony of pain.

Gradually the mist grew lighter, the flashes fainter, and very far away, low voices sounded murmuring words of love. Consciousness came in sickening waves, and Candace finally opened weary eyes upon her own room in the Butterfly House, with Aunt Anne sitting by her side, Dr. Chapin and a white-capped nurse bending over her, and at the foot of the bed, looking terribly serious, Uncle Charles.

“What has happened?” Candace asked, wondering why all the faces looked so anxious, save Aunt Anne’s, which wore a shaky smile. Then she realized that her head, shoulder and chest were all bandaged. Next came full recollection.

"The children," she asked, "were they hurt?"

"No, Candace," said Dr. Chapin gently. "You saved them both."

"And Cary?" she added, after a second.

"Perfectly all right," replied Aunt Anne, kissing her. "Go to sleep, dear, and don't try to think."

"But what has happened to *me*?" Candace persisted uneasily.

"Don't try to move, dearie," said the nurse. "The truck knocked you to one side and banged you up a little, but we are going to make you right very soon. Now, drink this."

Candace obeyed. Then, with one hand clasped in Aunt Anne's she again drifted into oblivion, this time merciful and dreamless.

Down in the living-room, Cary was clinging to Janet and crying desperately as they waited for word from above. Not until Candace became conscious could they be certain how badly she was hurt.

Fortunately the suspense was not long. Soon both Dr. Chapin and Mr. Dexter came down to the anxious girls with a cheering report. Candace had not been run over, only

tossed aside by a glancing blow as the truck careered past; her head and shoulder bruised, three ribs broken, but no irreparable injury.

“Talk of heroism!” said Dr. Chapin, blowing his nose. “In these days our girls as well as our boys do brave deeds.”

“Father,” said Janet, taking him by the hand and drawing him into the hall, “I think I can be of use here for a little. Cary will have to move out of her room so Candace’s nurse can be next door, and I will help her.”

“Cary must go to bed herself,” said Dr. Chapin. “She has had a serious shock and fright. Get me a glass from the dining-room, Janet, and I’ll leave something for you to give her after you get her settled in bed.”

Back in the living-room, Cary had seized her father and was sobbing hysterically on his shoulder.

“Daddy, I am a coward, the biggest coward on earth! I stood there beside Candace and I saw the truck coming and the children, and I never moved. It never occurred to me to try to save them. If I thought at all it was that they were only little French-Canadians from the lower village. The only idea I had was to

get out of the way myself. Oh, I am so wicked and *such* a coward!"

"Listen, little girl," said Mr. Dexter tenderly, smoothing the disheveled head that rested on his shoulder. "There are different kinds of heroism. And the kind that saves life in a sudden emergency is almost always an impulse, good and noble, but still an impulse. When Candace is able to talk, I think you will find that she didn't think what she was to do,—she simply *did* it,—moved by a force that swept everything before it."

"That makes me worse," sobbed his daughter. "I did think and it was only of myself. I didn't care about the children."

"You may be right in thinking that you do not respond to an outside stimulus, as we call it, so quickly and instinctively as Candace, but that does not prove you incapable of heroism. There are different kinds, though this is the one that the world most readily recognizes. Just every-day life calls for real heroism. You have been courageous in that way all the time that Mother has been laid up."

Her father's words gradually brought comfort to Cary. When Janet returned she was

calmer, and after one look at Candace, comfortably asleep, she made no objection to going to bed herself in the southeast room to which Janet transferred her possessions. Janet stayed with her till into the evening, and later, waking from a troubled dream, Cary suddenly realized that her father sat reading by a shaded lamp in her room, and somehow his very presence instantly banished the sense of horror with which she had started up.

For several days Candace was seriously ill, too ill to know how her plucky act had thrilled Ridgefield, unable even to see the flowers that came, or know of the many inquiries made for her at the Butterfly House. But in a short time, she began to gain, and her convalescence was so rapid that Amy and Janet, as well as Cary, were admitted as daily visitors.

Naturally the Ridgefield weekly paper made the most of the runaway truck and the rescued children, an item copied into a Burlington daily, which pictured the Lefevre twins as large as life and twice as handsome, Jean Baptiste attired in a Lord Fauntleroy suit, Rose Marie in a plush coat and bonnet. The reporter who secured these triumphs of the photographer's

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art tried in vain to obtain a picture of Candace. Papers as far away as Boston and New York gave a paragraph to the event, and some information concerning Candace and her native town so astonishing in its inaccuracy that modest Candace would never have recognized herself as the central figure.

One day the morning train brought a stranger to Ridgefield, a gentlemanly, middle-aged person, whose business in the place remained a mystery till the drug-store clerk announced that he was a reporter for a high-toned New York weekly. This surmise seemed proved correct, for, whatever use he intended to make of the material gathered, he showed great interest in finding out exactly what happened on the day the truck plunged down the hill.

He interviewed at least ten persons who had been witnesses of the affair; spent half an hour in the two-roomed cabin occupied by the Lefevres, listening patiently to eulogies of the miraculously rescued twins; surveyed the truck where it yet lay, a mass of ruins showing above the river ice; he called on the Reverend Henry Richards. Then he appeared in Dr. Chapin's

waiting-room, to be shown into the office on arrival of his rightful turn.

Next, he was reported at the Butterfly House, and it was fortunate, all Ridgefield agreed, that Candace was now living there, for a picture of the butterfly so familiar to all would lend an unusual touch to that sketch for which he so earnestly sought material. There were even wagers as to whether he would gain admittance, for it was known that Lizzie shut the door in the face of a correspondent from a Montpelier paper, and that Mr. Dexter refused to see him when he audaciously invaded the High School. But after a brief parley, the front door of the Butterfly House opened to this stranger; not only did he gain admittance, but was not seen to leave till an hour passed.

His final act before disappearing from Ridgefield forever was to hire a horse and sleigh and drive up to the Halliday cottage on Thorn, presumably to obtain a photograph of Candace's birthplace. Half a dozen men and boys offered to act as coachman, but he informed the livery keeper that he wished to go alone. This did not prevent him from picking up Van Richards on

the way, leaving the town to wonder in what supernatural manner Van had managed to make his acquaintance. Little wonder that when the stranger finally took himself and his notebook away on the evening train, concerted effort was made to induce Van to divulge for what paper or periodical he was a reporter. But as ever, Van was annoyingly unexpected.

“Reporter, nothing!” he announced flipantly to the questioning audience in the corner drug-store. “Do you think Mr. Dexter would waste his time on a pencil-pusher, much less let him talk with Cary?”

“But what *was* his business?” asked the druggist, giving Van the bottle of listerine he had been sent for. “What was he poking round town for, asking a thousand questions about the truck and how it started and all?”

“H. O. K.,” replied Van with an exasperating shrug of his shoulders, “which is, being interpreted, Heaven only knows! Except myself,” he added provokingly as he left the store, “and I swore that I wouldn’t tell.”

CHAPTER XXVII

COUSIN ANTHONY COMES

CANDACE, rather thin, her lovely coloring somewhat faded, and with a head covered by short chestnut ringlets, for her glorious hair had been cut during that first week after her accident, chanced to be sitting on the wide porch of the Butterfly House the day that Cousin Anthony came.

Spring, hovering fitfully in the neighborhood of Ridgefield, was waking crocuses and daffodils from their winter sleep, bringing constant surprises to the Dexter family, none of whom knew the garden nor where things might naturally be expected to pop up. That very morning, Candace exclaimed over a host of gay little yellow blossoms, arriving overnight amid the grass of the lawn, and Cary came running in with a handful of heavenly blue scilla, found in a sheltered spot below the library bay window. Now, she and Chrissy were making the most of

this sunny Saturday morning, raking away protecting leaves and disclosing hidden treasure of snowdrops.

Candace saw the stranger pause before the house, but thought nothing of it, since even the passing inhabitants of Ridgefield usually lifted their eyes to the Butterfly. One seeing it for the first time would naturally delay to study it closely. But after surveying the façade of the house, the gentleman ran a carefully appraising eye over the grounds, then opened the gate and came slowly up the walk. As he approached the porch, he lifted his hat.

"I wonder if this is my cousin Cary?" he asked with a pleasant smile.

"I'm Candace Halliday," was the reply. "That is Cary with the rake."

The visitor turned in the direction indicated. Cary straightened up, her hands full of snowdrops.

"You don't know me, I fancy," the stranger went on. "Did you ever hear of Anthony Davenport?"

"Oh, yes," said Cary cordially. "Indeed, I have, Cousin Anthony. Daddy often speaks of you. Why, the Butterfly House belongs to you.

I can't shake hands because I've been grubbing in the border here," she went on. "Mother and Daddy went to Burlington for the day, but they will be so glad to see you. Candace is my adopted sister, and this is little Christine."

Candace shook hands and Chrissy gave him a bewitching smile. Cousin Anthony was about Mr. Dexter's age, with graying hair, a keen, pleasant face, and a prosperous look.

"Daddy will want you to come to us," Cary said after they had chatted a few minutes, during which she promptly decided that she liked Cousin Anthony. "They won't be home till late, so please telephone for your bag to be sent over and have luncheon with Candace and me. They won't like it at all if I let you go to the hotel, and indeed, you won't like it either. It's not a place one would choose to stay."

Anthony Davenport, who had once known Charles Dexter intimately, and whose boyish affection had lasted through years of separation, did not hesitate to accept the invitation of his daughter. He himself returned to the station for his bag, thus giving Cary time to warn Lizzie of the visitor and to see that the southeast guest-room was in immaculate order.

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“I’m getting to be as good a housekeeper as you,” she declared to Candace. “No, you are *not* going to dust. You’re growing pale, and if you don’t sit down and rest, I shall put you into bed. Miss Rogers told me when she went that I was to be very strict with you, Candace Halliday. Here, you may arrange these flowers. No, indeed, I’m not going to waste them on Cousin Anthony till I decide whether he is worthy of having flowers in his room. Half are for you and half for our precious Mammy.”

At luncheon, Cousin Anthony made himself so agreeable that he and the girls were on terms of intimacy long before it ended. Such strides did their acquaintance make that later, when Candace and Chrissy both went up for their afternoon rest, he and Cary found themselves discussing the Butterfly House and Aunt Nancy’s will, subjects that Anthony himself would never have introduced, had not Cary, by chance references, betrayed that she knew all about both. After that, it was only natural that they should arrive by easy stages at the old secretary.

“Do you know,” he said when this point was

reached. "I am visiting Ridgefield partly to see if I can't at last come to some definite arrangement with Charles about that legacy. I had in mind to examine the secretary myself. I hope that to-morrow he will let me look at it."

"Do it now if you wish," said Cary. "I know Daddy won't object, for he lets me. I have spent three rainy afternoons over it, but it is the most disappointing thing. Come into the study if you like and we will go through it again. I haven't opened it since Christmas."

Cousin Anthony agreed and he and Cary inspected the secretary with the most minute care. It divulged nothing that Cary had not seen before except half a postage-stamp stuck in a crack.

"I cannot understand," said Anthony at length. "That will was the most extraordinary document, and so unjust to Charles. Had there been any trouble between him and Aunt Nancy, one could have explained it, but she was extremely fond of him. Why he, who lived in the Butterfly House most of his life, and loved every inch of it, should be cut off with an old desk, and I, who never saw the place, should

have it thrust on me, seems inexplicable. Your father is,—well, Cary, perhaps you may have noticed this trait at times,—shall we call it remarkably firm? I wanted him to have the place; I told him to go ahead and contest the will and I would not oppose it, but, hurt as he was, love and respect for Aunt Nancy held him back. Well, there's one thing sure," Cousin Anthony ended, rubbing his hair the wrong way as he paced up and down the study, "Charles cannot prevent having the Butterfly House left to him in *my* will! I told him as much and he had the impudence to tell me that I couldn't prevent his dying first if he chose to. I got even with him though; I told him I'd fix it so it would be saddled on his wife or any child he left. *What* did Aunt Nancy mean? What did she intend to do that she didn't? And *why* didn't she do it, whatever it was?

"And I don't suppose," he went on, continuing his uneasy tramp, "that your father is any more reasonable now than at any other time when I've tried to arrange things. But now that I'm going to France—"

"Oh, are you?" exclaimed Cary excitedly.

"Not to fight, child, they won't have me.

Past the age of usefulness, short-sighted, getting bald, no good to them that way, when it's a pity an old bachelor like me can't take the place of some young chap with a wife and babies. No, it's only to help with the ambulance work. Three or four young fellows I'm interested in, physically disqualified, too,—just going to sort of dry-nurse them. All I'm good for."

So Anthony jerkily designated his position as guardian angel of the entire ambulance unit he had equipped and was maintaining from his own pocket. Charles Dexter, who knew his cousin, would have read between the lines and guessed this, but Cary did not understand what his depreciatory words really meant. That he was going to the front was all she grasped.

"Oh, if you have a chance, do look up Arthur Chapin," she exclaimed. Cousin Anthony immediately produced a note-book already containing a number of names.

"Arthur Chapin, first lieutenant, aviation section, signal corps; Dr. Chapin, father; Janet, sister," he noted. "Anson Brooks, naval ensign, wife Katherine. Indeed, if I come across either, I'll make myself known. Well, I'd start

feeling happier, if your father would hear reason about the Butterfly House. Confound that secretary! I expect even yet the key to the whole mystery is under our very noses, if we only had wit to see it."

Cary, elbows leaning on the ledge of the old desk, looked wistfully into its disappointing pigeon-holes.

" 'Our eyes are holden,' " quoted Anthony, stopping in his promenade. "Some explanation exists somewhere, and some day the right person will come along and see it. It doesn't seem given to either you or me, Cary."

As he spoke, his glance fell on the blotter upon which Cary's elbows idly rested. Suddenly adjusting his glasses, he bent over it intently. Following the direction of his eyes, Cary saw that he was studying the faint ink-marks on the surface. One corner contained a very decided impression.

"Cary, is that a fresh bit of blotting-paper?" he inquired in a tone of interest.

"No, Cousin Anthony, I'm sure it isn't, because the secretary hasn't been used since we came. Daddy brought his own desk, you see,

and this has been opened only when I had a fit of hunting through it."

"Then the blotter must date from the days of Aunt Nancy," remarked Anthony. "Just detach it from its moorings and bring it into the other room."

The interested and mystified Cary did so. Taking the blotter from her, Cousin Anthony held it before the big mirror over the library mantel. The writing in the corner was now quite legible, but proved only the closing phrase of some letter. "Very truly yours, Nancy Dexter."

Further careful scrutiny revealed nothing else even intelligible upon either side of the blotter and with a comic gesture of despair, Anthony threw it upon the floor to resume his uneasy pacing.

"*What* did she mean?" he exclaimed in a kind of exasperated howl. "Where is the letter of explanation that she meant to leave for Charles, if not the actual deed itself?"

"A deed?" queried Cary.

"Yes," said Anthony, stopping exactly in front of her. "You see, except for those be-

quests, everything came to me. Filed carefully in Aunt Nancy's safe-deposit box were the deeds to the Butterfly House, of course turned over to me. Now I am as sure as I am of anything in this uncertain world, that Aunt Nancy executed another deed, a transfer, turning the property over to Charles. Where is it?

"I don't know how familiar you are with business," he went on, "but in appointed towns in every county or district, deals in real estate are recorded, entered on official files, which any one may consult. So sure was I that the transfer must exist, that I had the records at Burlington gone over, and a slow and exasperating job it was! That was some fifteen years ago, when I was in a tearing hurry to get hold of definite evidence to convince Charles. You see, to complicate matters still further, the old lawyer who made Aunt Nancy's will and did her business, died before her, so there was no one left who knew anything about what she meant to do. Very likely he would have known of the existence of the transfer deed, but there he was, dead and buried, gone to his reward, or the opposite, for I don't think he should have let her make such a will.

“They dragged along at Burlington, pretending to search those records, and every time I wrote, blowing them up, they sent me a letter as long as the Epistle to the Galatians, trying to calm me, and explaining why they couldn’t get on any faster. Red tape, all of it. But the long and short of it was that no record of such a transfer had ever been made. So I was dished. You see, even though we couldn’t find the deed, if I could show a record of it, its existence would be proved and Charles would quit being a balky mule. Where’s that ridiculous doll Aunt Nancy bequeathed your mother?” he ended with a sudden sort of bark that made his startled listener jump.

“Up in the attic,” replied Cary. “We were going to bring it down for Chrissy, but Mother decided that she didn’t want to see it around. Would you like to look at it?”

“I would,” was the emphatic answer. “That is, if it isn’t too much trouble. Let me help you get it.”

Together they visited the dark attic and brought down both trunk and doll.

“Now let’s see if there was any reason for *that* idiotic bequest,” said Cousin Anthony, ad-

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justing his glasses, which were being continually dislodged by his impulsive movements, and glaring fiercely at the inoffensive Judith.

“Take off her clothes, will you, Cary?”

Cary undressed the doll, and Cousin Anthony began to poke and punch all parts of Judy’s long-suffering anatomy, paying particular attention to her chest and round head, shaped like a cooky.

“When was this charming specimen last covered?” he asked.

“Not since Great-aunt Nancy herself did it for me,” said Cary, greatly interested in his performances. “And I never had it after all.”

“What!” exclaimed Anthony with another sudden bark. “Cary, can you sew?” he demanded abruptly.

“After a fashion. It depends upon what you want done. If it is anything fussy, you’d better wait till Candace comes down.”

“Can you sew up that doll’s head after I’ve ripped it open?” Anthony gruffly specified.

“Why!” gasped Cary. “You don’t think—? Let me get the scissors.”

By examination of the stitches it was easy enough to find the place where the final opening

had been closed, and Cary's excited fingers soon ripped the seam and pulled out the cotton batting with which the doll was stuffed. To their great disappointment, nothing else appeared.

"Aunt Nancy was no fool, though her sense of humor was queer," growled Anthony, "and unless she was in her dotage she wouldn't sew up an important paper in a rag doll. Probably she did re-cover it just for you. I'm sorry I've made all that trouble."

"Oh, *anything* is worth trying," sighed Cary, restoring the cotton to its place and plumping into shape Judy's pathetically flat person. "I can sew it up again in a few minutes."

Cary threaded a needle, and Anthony, echoing her sigh, took up the doll's discarded dress, pulling it idly through a half-closed hand.

"Do dolls ever have pockets?" he abruptly demanded, shaking out the full skirt. "I certainly feel something that crackles like paper."

"Let me see," said Cary, taking the dress and exploring its folds. "Yes, it has a pocket and there is a folded bit of paper in it."

Anthony impolitely snatched it from her. "Neither sealed nor addressed," he exclaimed. "We have a right then to look at it."

The little note was only a quarter-sheet of writing paper, folded to fit the tiny pocket.

“I am wondering whether Cary’s baby fingers will discover this first, or yours, my dear Anne, for the little frock will soon need washing. Charles has doubtless received the letter I left with my lawyer to be given him after my death and explaining the whereabouts of the fourth secret drawer. That you may spend in the Butterfly House the happiest days of a life that promises to be one of joy for you both is the sincerest wish of your old Aunt Nancy.”

Having read, the two looked at each other. “A fourth drawer!” gasped Cary. “Oh, Cousin Anthony!”

“That lawyer!” exclaimed Anthony. “Aunt Nancy was ill when he died; she never knew—That explains everything!”

He made two steps into the study and brought up before the old secretary, an expression of positively fierce determination on his face.

“Now, then!” he exclaimed. “Out with it, you senseless piece of furniture. This time we mean business. The drawer can’t be in the upper part, Cary; there isn’t a possible spot for it there.”

He removed one heavy, large drawer after another, to poke and punch the cavity behind

as Cary had once done. Then he dashed into the study to return with a newspaper which he spread on the rug.

"I want to tip these big drawers over," he explained. "Have you ever done that?"

"Never," said Cary, immediately helping with the task.

"You see," Anthony added, "the only place where there is *room* for a secret drawer is in this abnormally thick front."

Having turned over the top drawer, he carefully scrutinized its edges, paying particular attention to the neat dovetailing at the sides. Nothing seemed at all unusual about either that drawer or the second. The third, which was empty to begin with, was in its turn reversed and Anthony gave it the same close examination. There was absolutely no trace of a concealed opening.

"That's a wonderful bit of wood," he remarked, running his thumb along the edge. "It must have cost—"

He stopped with a sudden glance at Cary, then repeated the gesture. Nothing was visible to the eye, but to the sense of touch there was a slight slipping of the wood under his

thumb. There came a tiny crack in the bottom of the apparently solid front; the slide yielded to the continual gentle pressure, moved half an inch, slid entirely aside, and Cary and Cousin Anthony bumped their heads over the deep, narrow cavity it revealed.

Five minutes later, Candace, coming down refreshed from her nap, paused in amazement. Anthony Davenport, clasping Cary's hand in one of his own, the other wildly waving above his head a long piece of blue paper, was executing an extraordinary dance in the front hall of the Butterfly House. The astonishing capers of Anthony's gray gaiters, twinkling in time to Cary's slippers, held Candace's fascinated eyes, and both dancers were madly shouting snatches of "Tipperary."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CANDACE HAS A LETTER

CHARLES and Anne Dexter, returning late that afternoon from Burlington, were genuinely pleased to be greeted by dignified, severely decorous Cousin Anthony Davenport, whose marked calm was emphasized by the unusual flutter apparent in both girls, doubtless a little overcome by having to receive and entertain him during the absence of the heads of the house.

Anthony was charming at dinner, talked most entertainingly, without mention of that ever sore subject between him and his cousin Charles, the Butterfly House. Yet Mrs. Dexter noticed two or three glances exchanged across the table with Cary, glances so full of mutual liking and understanding that she concluded her friendly little daughter must really have made quite an impression on sober old Anthony.

After dinner, they adjourned to the library

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and here something seemed unusual. Every article had been removed from the big table around which the family was accustomed to gather. In the exact center of the bare top stood a red doll chair. In the chair sat Judith. Upon one of Judy's extended arms was pinned a long, rather narrow official-looking piece of blue paper; the other held a small folded note.

This peculiar arrangement caught the attention of both Mr. and Mrs. Dexter, who stopped in surprise. The next second Charles bent forward in amazement. "Warranty deed," he read. "Nancy Dexter to Charles B. Dexter."

With a gasp of astonishment he turned to his cousin. But Anthony, proper, grave, dignified Anthony, hand in hand with Cary, was careering around the library table in another dance, one quite as finished in form and abandoned in its ecstasy as their first attempt.

Mr. Dexter sat down abruptly. "What does it mean?" he asked. "Stop prancing, you crazy dervishes, and tell us where you found it."

They stopped and told him in simple language so that he could understand, but after all, it looked as though he didn't, for at the conclusion of their happy tale he still sat there, holding his

head in his hands. Neither the note in the doll's pocket nor the open secret drawer made the expected impression.

"But this deed has never been recorded," said Mrs. Dexter, looking at the blank lines intended for that purpose. "And Anthony has been in legal possession for fifteen years."

"Anne Dexter!" shrieked Anthony, bounding from the chair into which he had dropped exhausted. "Do you want me to die of heart-failure on the spot?"

"Hold your horses, Anthony," said his cousin, looking up. "I give in. Aunt Nancy didn't mean to disinherit me and that is all I care about. I would take the Butterfly House now, even as a gift at your hands, were that necessary."

"Sane and in his right mind after fifteen years of madness!" breathed Anthony, mopping his forehead with exaggerated relief. "All that is left is for me to alter my own will, since I can no longer give away what I don't own."

"But what became of Great-aunt Nancy's letter, the one that explained things to Daddy?" queried the excited Cary.

"We shall never know," replied her father,

still looking pale. "That lawyer died two weeks before her, when she was too ill to make other arrangements, perhaps even to know of his death. No one took over his business, and I have no idea what became of the office papers. No one knew that this transfer existed and all the other documents were in Aunt Nancy's safe-deposit box. Very likely the letter was lost."

"If I had given the doll to Cary as she expected, the note in its pocket would have come to light," observed Mrs. Dexter, turning it over in her fingers. "But I didn't, and I wouldn't even bring it down for Chrissy. I feel as though it was my fault."

"Either child might have lost that note without ever showing it to you," said her husband, looking up. "All it would have told us was that there was a fourth drawer. But, Anne, Aunt Nancy didn't mean to leave us out."

He looked at his wife with a smile that she understood. His refusal to yield to Anthony's urgings had not been the obstinacy denounced by his cousin, but real pain, because he sincerely loved the aunt who brought him up.

"And we have turned those drawers over long before this," he went on. "It all hinged

on Anthony's rubbing his thumb over that special end."

"Probably a magnifying-glass would have shown the crack," observed his cousin. "It was no easy job to make that cavity in the beginning, and whoever did it was a master craftsman."

"And now we shall never have to leave the dear Butterfly House," sang Cary.

"Oh," said her father suddenly. "This morning I received a letter from my old school board, offering great inducements to return to the Technical High next fall. And so you don't want to go, Cary?"

Not for an appreciable instant did Cary hesitate. "I *couldn't* leave Ridgefield," she said. "Not Amy and Janet, though I'd still have Candace—but the river and Thorn and the Butterfly House,—oh, no, no, Daddy, don't let's go."

"And the Ridgefield High School?" queried her father mischievously.

"I'm going to be one of its famous alumni!" retorted Cary. "Just wait till Candace and I are breaking records at college; that is, till Candace is. Do *you* want to go back, Mammy?"

"We neither of us do," said Mrs. Dexter in

a voice that for her was unusually serious, "and now," indicating the blue deed, "I don't very well see how we can. Dear as our old home was, still it was hard to find even a star to look at."

"Cousin Anthony," asked Cary, "do you feel quite strong and able to dance again? Because Candace isn't up to it yet and I feel that I must!"

Next week, Spring came to Ridgefield to stay, and seemed to save her sunniest smile for the garden of the Butterfly House, where crocuses and scilla were being crowded hard by daffodils and hyacinths. Cary developed an unsuspected enthusiasm for digging in the dirt, and Candace joined her when strength permitted.

"I wish I might go back to school," she observed one afternoon when both were in the garden.

"Daddy says you can easily study up this summer," replied Cary, digging furiously around the roots of a peony. "He intends to tutor you and says you can surely go on with your class. You *must*, Candace, or I shall drop back, too. I won't go to college without you. There! I've scratched up everything in sight."

"I only hope I can go at all," sighed Candace. "After I finish High School I shall have to stop and earn the money, before I even think of college."

"We'll see about that," replied Cary firmly. "I wish we knew surely where Cousin Anthony is going and if he is likely to run across the Ridgefield boys. Janet was so happy when I saw her at school to-day, because two letters came through from Arthur yesterday, and though he said he couldn't write half as much as he'd like, because of an executioner in black styled the Censor,—apologies to Barrie,—he was well and busy and very contented. Mammy is calling,—I wonder which of us. Probably you didn't take your egg-nog, Candace Halliday. Oh, she wants us both."

Cary dropped her trowel and pushed back her hair from a flushed face. "This day is positively hot," she sighed. "I'm crazy to see what summer is going to be in this garden. I don't believe I want to leave the Butterfly House even to visit Grandmother Cary. If she writes for me, you'll have to go. Look! I believe that was a hummingbird. I saw a dash in the air."

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Arm in arm the girls approached the porch where Mr. and Mrs. Dexter were sitting.

"Oh, the mail," Cary remarked. "Did I have any letters?"

"No, only Candace," replied her father, handing Candace a big envelope with an imposing name in the upper corner, and a small registered package.

"For me?" said Candace in surprise, for a letter was an unusual event to a girl without relatives, who had lived all her life in Ridgefield. She opened it with interest, quite unaware of the smiles with which the older people watched her. But she read, only to look up in amazement.

"I don't understand," she stammered.

"Let me look," said Cary, leaning over her shoulder. "Probably it's some advertisement that you don't have to tire your head over."

Charles Dexter chuckled as Cary bent her brows upon the sheet of paper. He was willing to wager that his quick-witted little daughter would grasp the essential fact that he more than suspected the letter contained.

He was not mistaken. Cary gave a sudden

shriek, clasped her hands, and whirled madly around on the tips of her toes.

“Candace, don’t you understand? The Carnegie Hero Fund! Look at the heading. You haven’t forgotten the truck and those little children in the road? They are awarding you a medal and listen,—*two thousand dollars* for ‘educational purposes as needed’!” she quoted from the letter. “Candace Halliday! oh, Candace Halliday! Daddy, was that *why* you called me in to see that man who came to ask about it? *It was?* Oh, *Candace!*”

“Two thousand dollars won’t come amiss when you finish with the High School and are thinking of college, will it, Candace?” asked Aunt Anne gently. “And it is given for educational purposes *only*, you see.”

Candace, pale but with shining eyes, sat almost stunned. Suddenly she turned to look up to Thorn where stood the cottage in which Andrew Halliday had dreamed of college for both himself and his daughter.

Some moments passed, before Candace with trembling fingers opened the package and looked at the bronze medal it contained, bearing on one

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side the medallion bust of its founder, the words "Carnegie Hero Fund" and the date of its establishment. The reverse, beautifully designed and decorated, bore within the space provided for that purpose, the name of Candace Halliday.

"Oh," said Candace in a voice that she tried hard to keep under control, a task not rendered easier by Cary's embracing arms, "oh, what have I ever done to deserve all this? To belong in the Butterfly House and have this in addition, just because in a moment when I didn't even stop to think, I pulled two little children out of the street!"

"There is something else on your medal, Candace," said Uncle Charles. "Read it and you will understand why."

Candace looked again at the medal, deciphering the tiny beautiful letters around the margin of the reverse side.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

THE END

